The New Criterion

April 1996

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

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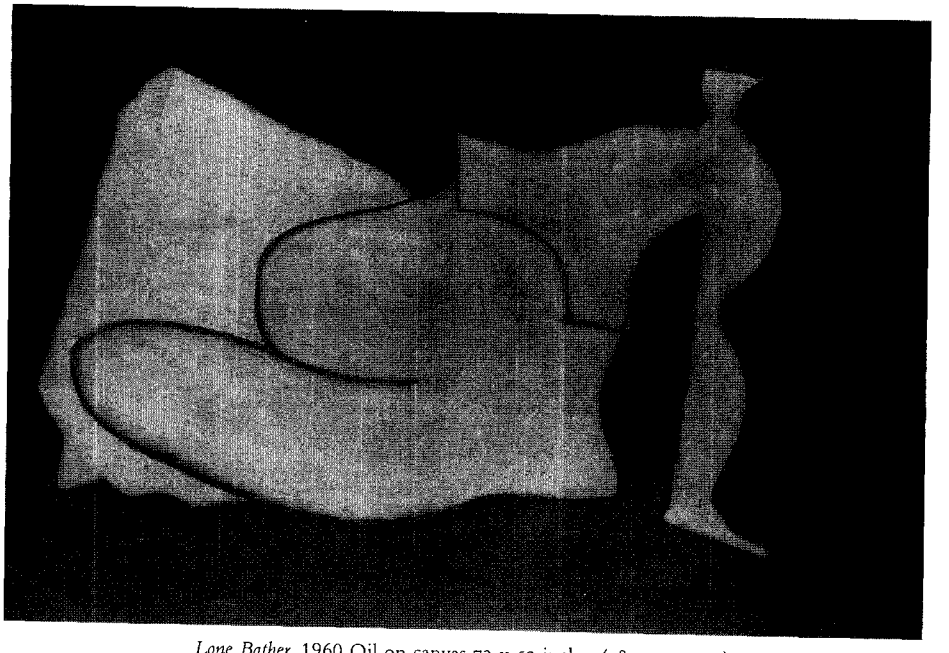

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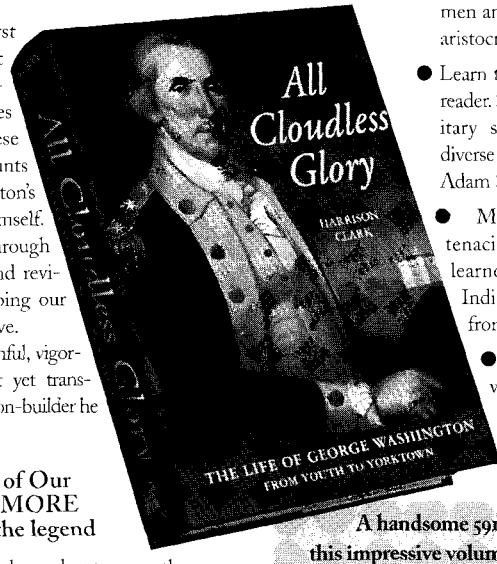

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Notes & Comments: April 1996

The Barnes debacle continues on its destructive course

It hardly seemed possible that the situation at the Barnes Foundation in Merion, Pennsylvania, could get any worse than it was. But with the latest round of lawsuits and countersuits that have now been generated by the actions of the current administration of the Foundation, a situation that was already pretty bad has grown appreciably worse.

To understand the ostensible basis for this latest concatenation of suits and countersuits, it needs to be recalled that the late Albert C. Barnes created the Foundation as a school for the study of art. The great collection of modern paintings and other art objects that are the principal assets of the Foundation was personally assembled by Dr. Barnes for that educational purpose. He was well acquainted with the great art museums of his day, and for the most part he very much disapproved of the superficial way they ministered to the aesthetic needs of the public. The Barnes Foundation was specifically created to provide a serious pedagogical alternative to the standard museological experience of art.

It is possible to disagree with Dr. Barnes's ideas, of course; many people do. But there can be no doubt about the purpose they were meant to serve. In the Foundation's own archives there reposes an extensive record of Dr. Barnes's correspondence with Bertrand Russell, John Dewey, Leo Stein, and others, in which this fundamental aesthetic-pedagogical purpose is systematically explored and defined, and it is also clearly reflected in the books—on Cézanne and Matisse, among other subjects—written by Dr. Barnes himself. Moreover, it was unequivocally stated by Dr. Barnes when he provided for a foundation, as he said, "to be maintained perpetually for education in the appreciation of the fine arts."

Yet from the outset of the campaign to abrogate the provisions of Dr. Barnes's bequest it has been arrogantly and incorrectly argued that the Barnes Foundation, despite the clearly stated intentions of its founder, was really all along an art museum only pretending to be a school. Unfortunately, the courts have repeatedly upheld this misrepresentation that has now led to the sordid and costly tangle of legal actions that cast a considerable doubt about the future of the Foundation.

What has happened is this: the citizens of Merion, a quiet suburb of Philadelphia, have grown fearful that the current effort to turn the Barnes Foundation into what one resident described—altogether accurately in our opinion—as a "Getty-type commercial museum," would, if successful, radically

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change the quality of life in their town by attracting heavy traffic, tour buses, holiday crowds, and all the attendant hazards that nowadays can quickly turn even the most picturesque village into a nightmare of rampant tourism. An effort was thus made by town commissioners and others who live in Merion to require the Foundation to abide by its legal status as a private educational institution. To function as a public art gallery would, apparently, require a permit which the Foundation has never been granted.

In retaliation for this action, the current president of the Barnes Foundation—Richard H. Glanton, a Philadelphia lawyer who is black—has brought a civil rights action against the Merion township commissioners and certain other residents of Merion, all of them white, charging them with, of all things, "racial bias." Then, in response to this bizarre suit, the town commissioners and seventeen of their neighbors filed a defamation suit against Mr. Glanton and three other Barnes Foundation trustees.

Where this costly and utterly grotesque carnival of legal horrors will end, no one can now say. What is certain, however, is that with each passing day Dr. Barnes's program for a foundation specifically designed "for education in the appreciation of the fine arts" is made to suffer a continual betrayal. It is all a ghastly fable of what has happened to art, to art education, and to the political and financial exploitation of both art and education in our time. And it is very likely that, in this case, the worst is yet to happen.

Mr. Holland capitulates

It was only to be expected that *The New York Times* would fall madly in love with *Rent*, the "rock opera" that—with no little help from the *Times* itself—is turning out to be this season's biggest and most bogus theatrical sensation. After all, any work that combines rock music *and* AIDS *and* drug addicts *and* a multiracial cast *and* one star who plays a lesbian performance artist and another who plays an HIV-positive transvestite sculptor is calculated to spark a lot of heavy breathing at the *Times*'s culture desk. Add to this a story line "updated" from Puccini's *La Bohème*—but transposed to Manhattan's Lower East Side for "realism"—and you have a mixture that is irresistible to anyone who prefers his sensationalistic trash overlaid with a few rhinestones of "culture."

This winning combination alone would doubtless have assured the success of *Rent* (reviewed in these pages last month by Mark Steyn), which is now moving on to Broadway after a wildly successful opening run at a tiny off-off-off-Broadway spot. But when the thirty-five-year-old composer of *Rent*, Jonathan Larson, was found dead of an aortic aneurysm in January just a few days before the show was to open—well! For the *Times*, anyway, this personal tragedy instantly transformed the hitherto unknown Larson into an artistic martyr and *Rent* into a work of unquestionable genius.

So it was hardly a surprise when on Sunday March 17 the *Times* devoted a large proportion of its Arts & Leisure section, including most of the front page, to various tributes to *Rent* and its ill-fated author. Inevitably, the cultural benchmark to which *Rent* is compared is that compendium of 1960s fatuousness, *Hair*. *Rent* is indeed a "*Hair* for the 90s," as the *Times* gushed—though it lacks the one really significant thing about *Hair*, namely its status as a novelty object. Once upon a time, nudity and obscenity on stage were shocking; now such antics are usually little more than evidence of a certain species of dramatic impotence: artistic aphrodisiacs resorted to when genuine theatrical imagination fails.

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For the most part, the *Times*'s chorus of praise was Pavlovian in its predictableness: "one man's vision," "a classic tale of luck grit, ambition," etc. But the "Classical View" column by Bernard Holland, the *Times*'s chief music critic, distinguished itself by surprising even us with its abject capitulation to everything trendy and meretricious in the response to *Rent*. Mr. Holland began by citing a recently published letter to the editor that had contrasted walking across the campus at Yale University thirty years ago—when on a sunny Saturday afternoon what wafted out from dormitory windows were the sounds of the Metropolitan Opera broadcast—with the situation today when virtually the only thing heard is rock music. The writer—correctly—deplored this development. But the chief music critic of *The New York Times* (whose companion at *Rent*, he told us, was "a bona-fide rock-and-roller") does not consider the triumph of rock music an evil omen; on the contrary, he castigated the letter-writer for being hidebound and—most egregious of sins for the politically correct—"exclusive." Here is the key passage of his animadversion:

> Classical music, having carefully developed a two-centuries-old cult of the past, now finds itself in an ambivalent position. It rightly defends a repertory of great music by dead composers, but it has become distinctly inept at handling the present. The righteous indignation of our letter writer abets the suicidal tendencies of so-called high culture. High culture places its artifacts at the peak of a mountain and proceeds to push away the ascending creative minds that are not of its direct bloodline. Art like this retains its identity as do all closed societies: by rejection.

"So-called" high culture? "Direct bloodline"? "Closed societies"? What, we wondered, could Mr. Holland be thinking of? The good opinion of his "bona-fide rock-and-roller" companion, perhaps? He certainly wasn't thinking about the music. Indeed, he acknowledged that "from a musical point of view" he "wanted *Rent* to be better than it is." (He also noted the "college-dorm patness to the show's social politics"—that is to say, its adolescent radicalism, self-indulgence, and anti-Americanism.) But the *Times*'s chief music critic argued that "whether or not *Rent* succeeds as an opera, a musical or anything else is beside the point." Really? What does matter, apparently, is that *Rent* "brims with good will," that the "effort behind it" and its "sense of adventure" "say something serious about a sophisticated culture trying painfully to create a more inclusive art."

"A more inclusive art"? Again we have to wonder what Mr. Holland can possibly be thinking of. Someone with his long experience of classical music surely knows that few art forms have been more omnivorously inclusive than classical music, which precisely over the two-centuries he mentions has shown itself open to all manner of vernacular traditions from folk songs to jazz. What Mr. Holland cannot bring himself to admit is that rock music—which consists of little more than a handful of simplistic musical clichés repeated *ad nauseam* and at great volume—is really a form of anti-music. It is not the new hope for youth culture but a sign of the artistic poverty (not to say moral degeneration) of that culture. There is plenty to disagree with in Plato's social philosophy, but he was surely correct that we can tell a great deal about the character of a society by the character of its music. What does the character of rock music—which, as Mr. Holland notes, is coming to "dominate" the world—tell us about ourselves? Mr. Holland ends by proclaiming that, as someone who has spent his life with classical music, he is "alarmed for the future of its important artifacts." We are alarmed, too—and not least because that future is increasingly being looked after by people who, like Mr. Holland, have given up on high musical achievement and are busy cultivating its demotic caricature.

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Whose Enlightenment is it?

by Roger Kimball

Do not believe a word you hear from the young when they talk about the "new morality." . . . When people talk of the "new morality" they are merely committing a new immorality and looking for a way of introducing contraband goods. . . . [I]ts state of mind will consist, decisively, in ignoring all obligations, and in feeling itself, without the slightest notion why, possessed of unlimited rights. . . . [T]he apparent enthusiasm for the manual worker, for the afflicted and for social justice, serves as a mask to facilitate the refusal of all obligations, such as courtesy, truthfulness and, above all, esteem for superior individuals.
—José Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses*

The essential of any important heresy is not simply that it is wrong: it is that it is partly right.
—T. S. Eliot, *After Strange Gods*

In a short essay called "My Cold War," first published in 1993 and reprinted as the last chapter of his recent book *Neoconservatism: The Autobiography of an Idea*, Irving Kristol traces the evolution of his political opinions and meditates on the implications of the end of the Cold War. "There is," he writes, "no 'after the Cold War' for me."

> So far from having ended, my cold war has increased in intensity, as sector after sector of American life has been ruthlessly corrupted by the liberal ethos. It is an ethos that aims simultaneously at political and social collectivism on the one hand, and moral anarchy on the other. It cannot win, but it can make us all losers. We have, I do believe, reached a critical turning point in the history of the American democracy. Now that the other "Cold War" is over, the real cold war has begun.

I agree with Mr. Kristol's assessment. The end of the Cold War has if anything brought a renewed virulence to America's so-called "culture wars." And these battles—which involve fundamental questions about the moral and spiritual texture of our lives—promise to be as significant for our society as was the struggle against Communism. How should we live our lives? What feelings, thoughts, and habits should we cultivate? Which should we discourage—in ourselves and in others? What, finally, counts as the good life? Such questions form the battleground on which the culture wars are fought. Particular skirmishes—over education, the arts, sexuality, popular culture, entitlements—generate the startling passions and animosities they do precisely because, each in its own way, they touch on such core questions.

I was often reminded of Mr. Kristol's observations while reading *The Twilight of Common Dreams*, Todd Gitlin's new book about the culture wars.[1] Indeed, Mr. Gitlin,

1 *The Twilight of Common Dreams: Why America Is Wracked by Culture Wars*, by Todd Gitlin; Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt, 294 pages, $25.

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who is currently a professor of "culture and communications, journalism, and sociology" at New York University, cites part of the passage I quoted—but not, as anyone familiar with his earlier work will doubtless have surmised, in order to agree with it. On the contrary, this former president of Students for a Democratic Society and longtime professional radical adduces Mr. Kristol's judgment as a prime example of how "ideologues of the Right," who nowadays lack "external barbarians" to fight against, have begun "to search for domestic ones" in order to manufacture a "moral equivalent of the Cold War."

This might seem an odd conclusion for someone writing a book whose subtitle is "Why America Is Wracked by Culture Wars" and who tells readers that his "chief aim is to understand where our symbolic melodrama come from, and what these distortions and distempers [a favorite word] reveal and conceal about the perennial dilemmas of American identity and the contemporary incapacity of American politics." After all, either the culture wars are a problem or they are not; and if Mr. Gitlin proposes to explain *why* America is "wracked" by culture wars and various "distempers," then presumably he thinks that such conflicts are a problem, too. It's not a matter of "searching" for barbarism but simply recognizing it for what it is—namely barbarism. Perhaps Mr. Gitlin believes that only someone whose left-wing credentials are in order may pronounce on such important matters. In any event, this—what shall we call it? a paradox? an anomaly? a tension?—crops up again and again in the pages of Mr. Gitlin's short book. It is of course edifying to learn that "the alarmism of Roger Kimball, Hilton Kramer, and Irving Kristol makes an easy target." But what of Mr. Gitlin's alarmism? (Or shall we say his distempers?) He provides his book with an epigraph from Frederick Douglass warning that the slaveholder is "every hour silently but surely whetting the knife of vengeance for his own throat." Who is the "slaveholder" in Mr. Gitlin's drama? What "vengeance" does Mr. Gitlin imagine (or perhaps even long for)? It would be an excellent thing to explain why America is "wracked by culture wars." Mr. Gitlin does not, alas, manage to do this. But considered symptomatically, as a kind of case study of disappointed leftism, *The Twilight of Common Dreams* does have something to teach us. There can be few books that dramatize their author's confusions quite so patently. And in this sense, regarded as a compendium of contemporary left-wing rationalizations, Mr. Gitlin's book is worth examining by anyone interested in the fate of our culture.

Not that tracing the book's argument is always an easy task. To be sure, Mr. Gitlin is a canny and articulate writer. And as a bona fide Sixties radical (he was born in 1943 and spent many years teaching at the University of California at Berkeley), Mr. Gitlin knows the terrain of the culture wars from the inside, as it were. Yet if he is a bona fide Sixties radical, he is (like so many American radicals) one who was early on absorbed into the academy. As usual, the union of radicalism and academia produces a slightly comic, not to say unreal, effect. There is something about the combination of denim and tenure that is inherently preposterous. Professor Gitlin is very earnest when he utters words like "inequality," "poverty," "racism," and so on, which he does early and often. Clearly, he is a man in search of a movement. He is never happier than when declaiming against the "stupefying degree of inequality in American society" or informing the reader that "males in Bangladesh have a better chance of living past age forty than males in Harlem." (There are many such assertions in this book.)

But somehow Mr. Gitlin's complaints never quite crystallize into a coherent picture. This is partly because the radicalism of Mr. Gitlin's youth has gotten away from him. What started with the Free Speech Movement in the early Sixties (a "decisive innovation" in Mr. Gitlin's assessment) has somehow mutated into a situation where

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speech is routinely censored by the commissars of political correctness. This puts Mr. Gitlin in an uncomfortable position. He likes to talk about "freedom," "maintaining solidarity with the oppressed," and so on. But today's academic radicals are generally partisans of one or another species of identity politics—feminist, ethnic, sexual, or all of the above. Although they adamantly deny that such a thing as political correctness exists—especially when the charge comes from a source identified as "conservative"—they nonetheless eagerly pursue a policy of political correctness, subjecting speech, the curriculum, hiring and recruitment practices, and myriad other things to political tests. Mr. Gitlin knows this. Accordingly, his difficult task in this book is to distance himself from the essentially repressive practices of today's radicals without tarnishing his own radical credentials. This makes for some interesting, if not convincing, intellectual acrobatics. He concludes that radical curricular reforms, which led to the establishment of black studies programs, feminist studies, and so on have been a "net good"; at the same time he decries the identity politics they presuppose as "a very bad turn for American life." The movement for political correctness is "virtually self-satirizing," but among its "benefits" are instilling "a sense of community" among its partisans.

A self-satirizing benefit is only one of the wondrous creations Mr. Gitlin conjures for his readers' entertainment. One of his chief targets is that species of identity politics that makes leftish "bridge building" impossible. And to this end Mr. Gitlin presents himself in the role of conciliator, welcoming all (left-leaning) people into his big tent. At the same time, his liberal white guilt over past injustices keeps intruding: "Why," he asks, "should the descendants of slaves have to make compromises, pitch in, help form majorities?" The answer, of course, is because they are no longer slaves but citizens.

There are two main themes and one underlying assumption in *The Twilight of Common Dreams*. The themes are, first, that the Enlightenment idea of a common humanity that transcends such contingencies as race, sex, class, and ethnic origin articulated a worthy, universalist ideal and that (the second theme) this ideal has been jeopardized with the rise of identity politics, multiculturalism, etc. Put in this bald fashion—something that Mr. Gitlin is careful to avoid doing—one might think that Mr. Gitlin had turned over a new, conservative leaf. After all, conservative writers have been making this basic argument ever since the phenomenon of identity politics was first descried. But Mr. Gitlin's underlying assumption is that the conservative attack on political correctness, multiculturalism, and their attendant social and intellectual pathologies is fundamentally unsound because . . . well, because it is conservative.

I am not sure that Mr. Gitlin is an especially good guide to the nature of Enlightenment ideals. For example, his observation that "the Enlightenment says human beings are born and die, and in between, they seek to live" does not inspire much confidence on this score. Nor is it clear that the Enlightenment ideals he wishes to champion are historically the sole possession of the Left, as he seems to assume. (In fact, it is not even clear that they are exclusively the products of the Enlightenment: the idea of a universal common humanity, for instance, is at least as old as Christianity.) In any event, the maunderings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau do not, fortunately, exhaust the riches of the Enlightenment.

But Mr. Gitlin is desperate to claim the mantle of the Enlightenment for the Left, and he is willing to go to considerable, indeed, tendentious lengths to do so. Thus: "the idea of the Left and the idea of America share a history—I am tempted to say also a destiny. They are the two great, heavily burdened ideas of the Enlightenment." Burdened, indeed. For Mr. Gitlin, everything good about the Enlightenment is colored pink; and by the same token, everything he doesn't like about the Left is a betrayal of

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the Enlightenment. Accordingly, he asks us (it is one of his major themes) to distinguish between "the late New Left politics of separatist rage" (bad) from "the early New Left politics of universalist hope" (Mr. Gitlin's era, and therefore good).

What he does not understand is how the very logic of radicalism, by absolutizing freedom, leads inexorably to tyranny. This is one of the chief lessons of the French Revolution, which begins with Rousseau and ends with Robespierre. It is not an accident that the French Revolution was conceived and prosecuted as a triumph of Rousseavian "virtue." Nor is it surprising that the virtue that appeared as a species of narcissism in Rousseau should turn rancorous when it entered upon the stage of politics. Not for nothing did Robespierre speak of "virtue and its emanation, terror."

Mr. Gitlin's discussion—or, rather, invocation—of the legacy of the Enlightenment is not the only vertiginous thing about his book. His unremitting effort to lodge all virtue with the Left makes for a veritable chapbook of silly remarks, to wit: "What we are witnessing in the culture wars is not the triumph of the Left but its decline." Or: "The Republican tilt of white men is the most potent form of identity politics in our time." Also delicious is his citation of the *MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour* as evidence of "the rightward shift in the media" and his assurance that "Marx objected only to shallow universalisms." Gee. Sometimes Mr. Gitlin descends to mere epithet-slinging, as when he describes the great industrialist Henry Ford as a "proto-Nazi." Never mind that Ford did more for the working men of America than a million professors of "culture and communications, journalism, and sociology" will ever do, no matter how many times they have read *Das Kapital*. Henry Ford's position as a capitalist requires that he be demonized.

A good deal of this book is an exercise in excuse making. In his effort to salvage an attractive universalism of the Left, Mr. Gitlin is constrained to explain—or explain away—a number of inconvenient realities. And it must be said that, when it comes to simple brashness, anyway, he is rather expert at this. What about the rampant anti-Americanism of the New Left? (Remember "Amerika," flag-burnings, the vitriolic and frequently violent demonstrations against every aspect of American society?) Not to worry. According to Mr. Gitlin, such anti-Americanism as the New Left exhibited was "more a sentiment than a commitment." In one inadvertently telling passage, he explains that a "sufficiently broadminded onlooker" would have discerned that the anti-American antics of the New Left and the thousands they influenced were really only the "the rage of the rejected child pleading to be let in and loved." Those who rejected the New Left, he continues, were "too narrow, too resentful, too negative" in their Americanism; moreover, they were too literal, taking the attacks mounted by such spokesmen for the New Left as Abbie Hoffman "at face value." How ought they have been taken?

At bottom, *The Twilight of Common Dreams* is a book by a man of the Left who has been outflanked by the Left—something for which he cannot forgive the Right. That is to say, Mr. Gitlin wants to blame conservatives for the crepuscular gloom he discerns settling over his most cherished ideas. He is an old-style political activist who cannot acknowledge that the triumph of his principles has led to the eclipse of his ideals. He bemoans the fact that the Left has been (in the words of one of his chapters) "Marching on the English Department While the Right Took the White House." But there is an important sense in which this very phenomenon is at the heart of his subject, the culture wars. Far from signaling a "decline" of the Left, the institutionalization of radical sentiment in the university, the media, Hollywood, and indeed, in the landscape of American life represents the triumph of the ideals Mr. Gitlin and his comrades have been fighting for since the early Sixties. The startling and, to some, depressing fact is that conservative electoral victories have

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made nary a dent in the march of left-wing attitudes and ideas in our culture. That Mr. Gitlin's ideals look different when actually realized from when he dreamed about them as a twenty-something radical is a painful but common irony that attaches to all utopian projects.

The real importance of Mr. Gitlin's book lies not in its analysis of the culture wars but in its status as a specimen of the kinds of rationalizations we can now expect from one large precinct of leftist ideology. On most cultural matters, Mr. Gitlin comes down firmly on both sides of the issue. He grudgingly acknowledges that conservatives have "accurately observed" the radicalization of "Harvard, Hollywood, the Modern Language Association, . . . the National Endowment for the Arts," etc. But he dismisses the significance of those observations with a host of anodyne clichés and equivocations: when it comes to the culture wars "the issue is not the issue," there are "two sides to all the usual disputes," and so on. The overall effect of Mr. Gitlin's efforts to explain why America is "wracked" by culture wars is to trivialize the issues over which those wars are being fought. This is partly because Mr. Gitlin insists on blaming conservatives for the factionalism he discerns on the Left today, but it is also, I suspect, partly because he does not really take the culture wars very seriously. Mr. Gitlin is most at home in that realm where "rights" endlessly proliferate and the chief thing necessary for occupying the high moral ground is plenty of talk about racism, exploitation, and the perfidy of American society. Thus at the end of his book, he speaks of "the right to a job, education, medical care, housing, retraining over the course of a lifetime" as "the bare elements of an economic citizenship that ought to be universal." One can be sure that were such "rights" acknowledged, Mr. Gitlin would be back *instanter* with a more extravagant list.

Toward the end of his 1987 paean to the counterculture, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*, Mr. Gitlin noted that he wrote "not just about history but imprisoned within it, enclosed within the aftermaths of the Sixties, trying to peer over the walls." Those walls have been higher and more confining than he perhaps bargained for. Mr. Gitlin offers himself as a champion of the Enlightenment and its ideal of common humanity. Yet his idea of universality has a distinctly *gauchiste* tang to it. In his short classic, "What is Enlightenment?" Immanuel Kant wrote that the motto of Enlightenment thought was *Sapere aude!* "Dare to know!" Mr. Gitlin would have us revise Kant to read, "Dare to be Left!" It's not an Enlightenment that everyone will want to embrace.

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The dominion of Robertson Davies

by Brooke Allen

Always a bridesmaid, never a bride: Robertson Davies, who died last year at the age of eighty-two, never quite attained the international recognition he sought. Shortlisted for both the Nobel and Booker prizes in 1986 and for the Nobel again in 1992, he lost out in each case. His books sold reasonably well in the United States, but never in England. Yet in his native Canada Davies was accorded tremendous prestige, considered by many the nation's greatest author. His work has always had a special significance for his compatriots because throughout his career he grappled, more eloquently and relentlessly than any other artist of this century, with the troubled question of what it means to be a Canadian.

"Sometimes when I think of the great world family of the English-speaking peoples," he said in 1977, "I think of Canada as the Daughter Who Stayed at Home."

> I mean that in 1776 Columbia, a self-willed girl with a strong sense of her own independence, left her mother's house, after some high-pitched family rows, and set up a household of her own. At that time Canada elected to stay with Mother. . . . So what happened? Just what everybody with a knowledge of family behavior might expect to happen: Columbia, the naughty daughter, prospered mightily and Mother (who always had a sharp eye for success) became very fond of her. And the Good Daughter Who Stayed at Home became, in the course of time, rather a bore.

What is it about Canada that projects that boring image? Is there any justice in it? Has Canada indeed developed a nebulous national character as a result of fealty to a loyalist, Tory ideal of Englishness so outdated that even England has ceased to set store by it? In any case, as Davies pointed out, Canada's loyalty has earned her a poor recompense: the mother country seems to perceive her simply as a rather less vital version of the United States. Like the Old Country relations of one of Davies' Canadian heroes, the English are "pig-headedly determined that the pretence of Canadians not to be Americans was sheer affectation, to be rebuked whenever possible." The thoughtless disdain evinced in England for things Canadian could not be better illustrated than by a letter Davies himself received from an English theatrical producer who wrote to reject a play Davies had submitted: "You must realise that no one, but no one, has any interest in Canada."

Davies, who took a B.Litt. degree at Oxford and was a member of Tyrone Guthrie's company at London's Old Vic theater, might well have stayed in England and made his career there; he chose instead to return to Canada and to make the best of life in the country he regarded with such deep ambivalence. Even as a young man he was well aware that he was the personification of everything that was anathema to small-town Canada: he was an intellectual, an artist, and an unapologetic eccentric. All

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of these qualities went directly counter to provincial Canadian values and what Davies has defined as the Canadian "Myth of Innocence and Moral Superiority." "Deep in our hearts," wrote Davies, "we Canadians cherish a notion . . . that we are a simple folk, nourished on the simpler truths of Christianity, in whom certain rough and untutored instincts of nobility assert themselves. . . . Such a Myth of Innocence is really a manifestation of pride." This myth engendered a second one, the "North American Myth of Sincerity, a myth which suggests that anything that is done skillfully, or with accomplishment, is of less worth than what is botched."

The popular theology of Anglophone Canada—a bleak Presbyterianism hardly leavened by evangelistic Methodism—added little in the way of beauty or pleasure to Canada's small towns and villages, which are so exquisitely rendered in the Deptford of *Fifth Business* and the Blairlogie of *What's Bred in the Bone*. Both of these fictional towns drew inspiration from Thamesville, Ontario, where Davies spent his first years and also, in part, from Renfrew, another town he lived in as a child, and Peterborough, where he spent twenty years as editor of one of his father's newspapers. "These Presbyterians," wrote Davies in *What's Bred in the Bone*, "might have had some trouble in formulating the doctrine of predestination or foreordination which lay deep in their belief, but they had no practical difficulty in knowing who was of the elect, and who belonged to a creation with a less certain future in Eternity."

To be quietly prosperous was admirable, but to have an inordinate amount of money—worse still, to enjoy spending it—was pretentious and showy. Anything beautiful was, almost by definition, immoral. Sex, apart from the purpose of procreation, was wicked (Davies discovered that his own grandfather had enjoyed congress with his wife only ten times during their long marriage, because she believed it to be wrong); art was definitely suspect, at best a harmless activity: on the lower end of the social scale it existed to keep the women occupied during long winter evenings while the men drank hooch in the barn; on the upper end, it was also an exclusively feminine activity, a "wonderful complexity of committees, every one with a vice-president, where endless games of organization can be played."

When Canadian intellectuals and artists do manage to survive, Davies implied, they tend to suffer from what one Dominions writer has identified as "cultural cringe." Davies' scholarly hero Dunstan Ramsay considered himself "far too much of a Canadian, deeply if unconsciously convinced of the inferiority of my own country and its people." It was Davies' wish that Canada might eventually recognize that it was in her power to develop an independent culture, one that is neither a pale reflection of distant England's nor of her aggressive southern neighbor's but purely Canadian, a culture suited to Canada's more introverted national character which Davies saw as neither English nor American but as specifically northern, something almost Scandinavian. He often referred to Ibsen as "Canada's greatest playwright," and Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* reminded him "poignantly of much of life in our own Dominion, where blighted hopes, frustration and waste of spirit are more common than we usually acknowledge."

For a while it looked as though Davies himself might live a life of blighted hopes. The first half of it was filled with disappointments of the sort to which gifted young men who fail to find the proper focus for their talents are prone. His first love, to which he was faithful for many years, was the theater; when he realized that he would probably never succeed as an actor (Tyrone Guthrie gave him the exceedingly backhanded compliment of telling him that if he persisted as an actor he "might develop quite a nice little career playing grotesques") he turned to playwrighting, although he knew full well that the cards were stacked heavily against Can-

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adian dramatists, whose work was almost as unlikely to find a producer in Canada as it was on Broadway or in the West End. During all of these years, he worked as editor on a small-town newspaper, a job which he performed with success but without passion, and it was not until he was past forty that he began to understand that it was in fiction, rather than drama, that he might make his mark.

William Robertson Davies was born on August 28, 1913, in the small Southwestern Ontario village of Thamesville.[1] His father, Rupert, a Welshman who had immigrated to Canada as a boy in 1894, was the owner and editor of the Thamesville *Herald*. He had not yet accrued the wealth that was to mark his son as a rich boy; the Davieses were small-town, middle-class folks, with theatrical and musical interests that made them somewhat different from the rest of the community but in essence hard-working Presbyterians like their neighbors. Davies' muse, like those of so many other good North American writers, was nourished by the apparently uneventful life of a small town: it is a microcosm of the greater world, making the writer in embryo privy to the intimate lives of all members of the community, both high and low. And Thamesville was especially rich in local eccentrics. Dunstan Ramsay's characterization of Deptford in *Fifth Business* could apply equally to Davies' Thamesville:

> We were serious people, missing nothing in our community and feeling ourselves in no way inferior to larger places. We did, however, look with pitying amusement on Bowles Corners, four miles distant and with a population of one hundred and fifty. To live in Bowles Corners, we felt, was to be rustic beyond redemption.

In 1919 the family moved to the larger town of Renfrew, Ontario, an abode, in Davies' memory, of "bleak, malignant ignorance" whose inhabitants were "troglodytes," "a bitter, evil, ingrown, ignorant pack of ruffians." Renfrew did much to inspire Blairlogie in *What's Bred in the Bone*, a town depicted with even less love than Deptford. A number of Renfrew incidents would eventually turn up in Davies' fiction: the dwarf, F. X. Boucher, who hung himself after being hounded by local yahoos, is an important figure in *What's Bred in the Bone*; so is the figure of a retarded child—a "Looner"—kept hidden away in a family's attic, an oddity of which Davies knew at least five examples in Renfrew.

After six years in this paradise, Rupert took his family to Kingston, a move which heralded a major improvement in the family fortunes and introduced Davies to a way of life that offered far more sophistication and beauty than he had known in the frontier towns of his childhood. Kingston—which would appear in Davies' fiction as Salterton—was an eighteenth-century colonial city of considerable charm: as Davies later wrote in the persona of his journalistic alter ego, Samuel Marchbanks, the city "has an air of venerable civilization which warms the heart; domes and spires, and the moral yet kindly outlines of its houses of refuge and correction give it a distinction of which any city might be proud." Rupert, who bought out the *Kingston Daily Standard* to amalgamate it with his own *Daily British Whig* and form the *Kingston Whig-Standard*, now began the rapid rise up the social scale that would eventually turn this once-penniless Welsh immigrant back toward his homeland to become a great Welsh landowner—the same spectacular, but fearsome and deracinating trajectory Davies ascribes to his character Rhodri Gilmartin in *Murther and Walking Spirits*. Davies himself became a rich boy, a position which might be privileged but yet has its downside, as Davies knew. "Whoever lives in the finest house in a small Canadian town," he later wrote, "dwells in a house of Atreus, about

1 A recent biography of the writer, *Robertson Davies: Man of Myth*, by Judith Skelton Grant, has been published by Viking (787 pages, $35).

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which a part of the community harbours the darkest mythical suspicions. Sycophancy is present, but in small store; it is jealousy, envy, detraction, and derision that proliferate."

Davies became a pupil at Toronto's Upper Canada College, an elite boarding school modeled on Thomas Arnold's Rugby and professing Arnold's ideal of muscular Christianity; Upper Canada College appears in a number of Davies' novels as Colbourne College. Here he quickly developed a flamboyant persona based on a dramatic wardrobe and an erudite, theatrical delivery. "He made it very clear," recalls one of his classmates, "that he was incomparably superior to any of the rest of us in so many ways, you know, but not arrogantly—charmingly." He discarded the Presbyterian faith of his upbringing and became an Anglican, socially a move upward but one that was undertaken, in his case, not purely from social motives; he had always admired Anglican liturgy and ceremony and deeply disliked the Presbyterian Sunday School presentation of Jesus as "a big softie who loved everybody and forgave everybody."

Davies excelled at literature and history, oratory and the theater: still a high-school student, he made a real name for himself in the Toronto theatrical world, which was then primarily an amateur one. He slaved away in vain, however, in science and mathematics—his travails are grimly recalled as those of Charlie Iredale in Davies' last novel, *The Cunning Man*—and his near-idiocy in these disciplines almost spoiled his chance for a higher education. Davies had made a colorful impression upon Upper Canada College, but he lacked the requisite passes to enter a Canadian University and was only saved by the generous offer of Queen's College in Kingston to accept him as a "special student," that is, one who could attend classes for three years but would not be eligible for a degree.

Throughout his time at Queen's College, Davies continued to distinguish himself in the humanities, acted in and directed countless productions, and developed an obsession with the theater that would haunt his life. The theater he was exposed to in prewar Canada was of a type that would soon vanish forever, the romantic and swashbuckling legacy of Henry Irving. In Kingston, Davies saw Irving's successor, Sir John Martin-Hervey, perform in *Scaramouche* and *The Cigarette-Maker's Romance* and fell in love for life with the noble ideal that the aging, slightly ridiculous actor-knight represented; he would make Martin-Hervey and his company a vital influence on his hero Magnus Eisengrim in *World of Wonders*. Davies saw that the ideal of Romance represented by Scaramouche and Martin-Hervey no longer held resonance for his contemporaries, but even as a young man he had enough historical perspective to realize that it was a case of "plus ça change," and, when he came to write *World of Wonders,* he would have Eisengrim articulate his own feelings. "Romance changes all the time. . . . Romance at that time meant *Private Lives*, which was brand-new. It didn't look to its audiences like Romance, but that was what it was. Our notion of Romance, which is so often exploration of squalor and degradation, will become old hat, too."

As soon as he found himself possessed of ample means, Rupert Davies bought a large country house in his native Wales, in which he spent a part of each year. The young Davies accompanied him and, through his father, got to know not only Wales but England, too, and in 1935 he entered Balliol College at Oxford. Even there, where eccentrics were a dime a dozen, Davies kept up his reputation as a "character." At Oxford he became intensely interested in the study of psychology that was to be so influential upon his later novels; he read Freud exhaustively and developed a reputation as "the Havelock Ellis of Balliol." Davies' passions, however, were centered upon the Oxford University Dramatic Society, of which he became one of the leading members. His studies, too, were directed by his theatrical interests: his thesis for the B.Litt.

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degree, *Shakespeare's Boy Actors*, aroused real interest and was accepted for publication, but its unfortunate date of appearance, between the Anschluss and the outbreak of World War II, determined that it would not be widely noticed.

For all the réclame Davies was earning, his time at Oxford was not a happy one; he suffered a nervous breakdown over his love for an unresponsive young woman, Eleanor Sweezey, almost ruining his academic career. He was to portray her sympathetically as Griselda Webster in his first novel, *Tempest-Tost*, and with hostility in *What's Bred in the Bone* as Ismay Glasson, the hero's cousin and unfaithful wife. On Davies' first sight of the painting that was to become his favorite, Bronzino's *An Allegory* in London's National Gallery, he was disconcerted to discern Eleanor's features in the figure of "Fraude," who has, in Erwin Panofsky's description,

> lion's or panther's claws, and the tail of a dragon or serpent. She offers a honeycomb with one hand while she hides a poisonous little animal with the other, and moreover the hand attaching to her right arm, that is the hand with the honeycomb, is in reality a left hand, while the hand attached to her left arm is in reality a right one, so that the figure offers sweetness with which seems to be her "good" hand but is really her "evil" one, and hides poison in what seems to be her "evil" hand but is really her "good" one.

Davies' ultimate recognition that Eleanor had indeed represented fraud in his life contributed to the growing interest in iconography and archetypal figures that would eventually lead to his defining himself as a Jungian, an allegiance that would both form and limit his fiction.

Davies' portrayal of Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* at Oxford caught the attention of Tyrone Guthrie, whose productions at London's Old Vic were exciting theater-goers. Guthrie's impression of Davies at that time is worth recording.

> One could tell in a moment that he was a Boy from the Dominions—a Pioneer—bred of the Wide Open Spaces: fat and scant of breath, like Hamlet, he wore very thick glasses which dangled affectedly from a very thick ribbon; his voice, like that of Miss Annie Laurie, was low and sweet, with an accent impeccably metropolitan; his turn of phrase courtly, spruce, picked, elegant, urbane; his turn of mind original, sophisticated and merry. His personality had a kick like a mule; one suspected too a mule's obstinacy.

Davies joined the Old Vic Company on Guthrie's invitation, and from 1938 to 1940 he served an intensive theatrical apprenticeship, playing a number of small parts under Guthrie's direction and acting as Guthrie's assistant (the callow young Roland Inglestree in *World of Wonders* is Davies' humble assessment of his own character at that time). During that period he met and eventually fell in love with Brenda Newbold, a pleasant and forthright young Australian, the Old Vic's first woman stage manager.

With the outbreak of war, Davies, whose poor eyesight prevented him from joining up, returned to Canada. In 1940 he and Brenda married, and later that year he accepted the literary editorship of *Saturday Night*, Canada's leading journal of opinion, and tried to launch himself on a career as a playwright. In 1942, however, he acceded to his father's urgent request and went to Peterborough, Ontario, as the editor of one of his father's publications, the *Peterborough Examiner*. He was not entirely happy about taking the job; he would have preferred to move entirely out of his powerful father's orbit, and he and Brenda disliked Peterborough, which epitomized much of what Davies had always detested in provincial Canada. Nevertheless, he stayed in the job for twenty years.

He made a success of the publication, and in the process earned a name as one of Canada's leading journalists: the essays he wrote under the pen name of Samuel Marchbanks have been published over the years in

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several collections which are mildly popular in the U.S. and beloved in Canada. In fact, though, the Marchbanks pieces display the worst, most mannered and affected aspect of Davies style, in which he sets himself up as a crusty but lovable curmudgeon, a persona not to everyone's taste.

In spite of his full life as a newspaperman, Davies continued to think of the theater as his vocation. He and Brenda directed and acted in local productions, and Davies wrote several plays, including *Overlaid*; *At My Heart's Core*; and *Fortune, My Foe*. Though these did not "travel" very well—Davies never caught on as a playwright either in the United States or England—they were well thought of in Canada and Davies achieved the somewhat dubious distinction of being considered Canada's premier playwright.

At the age of thirty-seven, discouraged by a theatrical career that never got off the ground, Davies decided to try writing a novel. He found the process surprisingly easy, and he finished *Tempest-Tost*, the first volume of what was to become the Salterton trilogy, only eight months after having begun it. Thus Davies began his career as a prolific and successful novelist. He was never a full-time writer, however: he continued as editor of the *Examiner* until 1963, when he moved to Toronto to take up the position of Master of Massey College, a college for graduate studies at the University of Toronto, and he held that job until his retirement in 1981.

Davies' fourteen novels have been grouped, almost arbitrarily, into trilogies. The Salterton trilogy comprises *Tempest-Tost* (1951), *Leaven of Malice* (1954), and the best of the trio, *A Mixture of Frailties* (1958)—an accomplished and moving *Bildungsroman* describing the trajectory of a young Ontario woman from a background of extreme intellectual poverty through a marvelous and unhoped-for period of voice training, and life training, in England. The Deptford trilogy, by far Davies' best-known work outside Canada and the novels on which Davies' international reputation rests, contains *Fifth Business* (1970), arguably Davies' finest book, *The Manticore* (1972), and *World of Wonders* (1975). "It was never my intention," Davies said of his Deptford books, "to write a trilogy, or even to write the second book. It just happened. The story ran on, and required to be told." Davies would repeat this assertion when discussing the Cornish trilogy: *The Rebel Angels* (1981), *What's Bred in the Bone* (1985), and *The Lyre of Orpheus* (1988). "I do not write trilogies, all neatly planned to follow in sequence: I write about groups of characters, and their stories get mixed up and sometimes cause some awkwardness. I am no Henry James worker in exquisite marquetry: my stuff is often very badly shaped." Nevertheless, Davies' last novels, *Murther and Walking Spirits* (1991) and *The Cunning Man* (1995), were closely connected and seemed designed to form the first two parts of yet another trilogy. In essence, though, his assessment of his writing methods was correct: of his novel sequences, only the Deptford books can truly be accounted a trilogy. The others are so loosely linked that each novel can be read quite independently of the others.

Tempest-Tost presented the story of the dramas involved in an amateur production of *The Tempest*, closely based on a 1935 alfresco production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Davies had directed in his father's gardens in Kingston. *Tempest-Tost* is amusing when it is not trying too hard to be so, and in it Davies achieved his first successful three-dimensional character: Hector Mackilwraith, a repressed mathematics teacher whose joyless life comes to a crisis when he falls hopelessly in love, at the age of forty, with the beautiful eighteen-year-old Griselda Webster. Hector's descent into a kind of madness and his attempted suicide are both sad and grotesque. But the book doesn't really succeed; by the time of the suicide attempt Davies had already established his tone of light comedy a little too well for even Hector's haunted soul to disturb it. *Tempest-Tost* is imbued with Davies' worst professional fault, a kind of sen-

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timental jocularity that comes dangerously close to cuteness.

Davies was not altogether pleased with the novel's reception; he believed that he had written something more substantial, universal. Some people, he felt, had mistaken his book "for a *funny* book to be read by old ladies at Torquay on winter afternoons. It is a *comic* book, and one of the comic things about life is the way in which the lovable and venerable may, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, become hideous, grotesque and even hateful." But Davies was wrong: *Tempest-Tost* was very much a funny book rather than a comic one—Angela Thirkell, let us say, rather than Barbara Pym. His evident desire to write a "comedy" in the Shakespearean sense makes *Tempest-Tost* too clearly a book with a plan, and kills its capacity for surprise.

The faults of *Tempest-Tost* anticipate the faults of Davies' later books, though some of those would be immeasurably better. The Shakespearian frame to which Davies tailored this first novel would give way, in time, to the Jungian one of the later works. The Jungian frame proved to be more fruitful; it helped to form Davies' finest novels, *Fifth Business*, *What's Bred in the Bone*, and *Murther and Walking Spirits*. Yet it is impossible not to consider the question of whether these books—all three of which are autobiographical, or rather, in Davies' own words, "spiritual autobiography"—might not have been better still without the often obtrusive Jungian apparatus. In *What's Bred in the Bone*, for example, the interruptions of the Lesser Zadkiel (the Angel of Biography) and the Daimon Marmas, as they observe Francis Cornish's life, are simply corny; the device is reminiscent, absurdly, of the dialogue between God and guardian angel that frames George Bailey's story in *It's a Wonderful Life*. Without them, the novel comes close to being a masterpiece; with them, the reader's nose is forever being rubbed in the author's intentions. Similarly, all the passion and directness of *Murther and Walking Spirits*, with its vivid, earthbound reality, are jeopardized by the ridiculous ending where the spirit of the dead narrator meets its anima in the mythical "Realm of the Mothers."

Davies' novels are also cheapened by the presence, in each, of a "magus" character (Humphrey Cobbler and Benedict Domdaniel in the Salterton trilogy, Liesl in the Deptford Trilogy, Saraceni in the Cornish trilogy, Hugh McWeary in Davies' last two books), a wise person who acts as a commentator and constantly intrudes on the novel's action to explicate its mythical subtext. This is an intolerably lazy device on the author's part. If a work of art is to be built upon a philosophy or a system of thought, then that system should inform the work rather than dictate to it, and when a novel is designed by its author specifically to illustrate an abstract system of ideas, it is usually doomed. It is a measure of Davies' considerable gifts that his novels work so well in spite of their didacticism.

Davies had turned away from Freudianism upon deciding that Freud's "cast of mind was powerfully reductive. After the Freudian treatment, things look a little shabby—needlessly so," he wrote. "Jung's depth psychology, on the other hand, is much more aesthetic and humanistic in its general tendency, and is not so Procrustean in its effect on artistic experience." Davies adopted the Jungian thesis that all narrative, myth, and fable is united by underlying truths about human culture across every society:

> Myth and fairy-tales are nothing less than the distilled truth about what we call "real life," and . . . we move through a throng of Sleeping Princesses, Belles Dames sans Merci, Cinderellas, Wicked Witches, Powerful Wizards, Frog Princes, Lucky Third Sons, Ogres, Dwarves, Sagacious Animal Helpers and Servers, yes and Heroes and Heroines, in a world that is nothing less than an enchanted landscape.

This is all very well when analyzing literature, particularly folk narratives, but

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used as a plan for writing original works its merits are doubtful. The risk is that the novel will descend into formula, that the process of creating a human life to fit the Jungian scheme will result in a paint-by-numbers work of art. This is the essential problem with the second novel in the Deptford Trilogy, *The Manticore*. Though Davies succeeds remarkably well in making its hero, David Staunton, come alive for the reader, he is nevertheless in essence a Jungian construct; the events of his life have been invented to illustrate aspects of the classic hero-tale. David is a fine illusion, but he is an illusion nonetheless. Worse, his journey toward enlightenment becomes increasingly bogus. His early emotional and intellectual discoveries with his Zurich therapist are expertly described, but once he leaves the controlled space of her office and takes up with Liesl Vitzliputzli—that hoary, transparent literary device—and descends with her into a terribly symbolic prehistoric cave in a scene worthy of D. H. Lawrence at his worst, David's story has become a patent fabrication. The disbelief which, early in the novel, the reader was eager to suspend, comes roaring back with a vengeance.

The Manticore teeters uncomfortably between fiction and dogma, but with all its faults it is on balance a good and worthwhile novel. At other times Davies was not quite so skillful, and *The Lyre of Orpheus*, by far his worst novel, shows how severely the Jungian framework could limit Davies' art. In this book Davies applied the mythical coating in several layers. E. T. A. Hoffmann's unfinished opera, *Arthur of Britain, or The Magnanimous Cuckold*, is to be completed by a gifted music student and given a lavish production. Hoffmann himself, languishing in a sort of limbo for artists who have not fulfilled their promise, watches the efforts and comments upon the results; should the opera succeed and become a real work of art, his spirit will be freed ("The lyre of Orpheus opens the door of the underworld"). Meanwhile, the various characters responsible for the production re-enact in their own lives the details of the Arthurian legend.

It's a precious concept, and presented in such a self-conscious fashion that it founders from the first page. Each step in the plot, every possible emotional nuance, is tediously explicated by the chorus of chattering academics that are supposed to be mounting the production but spend most of their time yakking away about the mythical significance of their own and their colleagues' activities.

> "Arthur, you are sometimes remarkably obtuse—not to say dumb," said Darcourt. "Now—I think I've had enough of this excellent Burgundy to ask you a very personal question. Haven't you seen your own myth in all that opera business? Your myth, and Maria's myth, and Powell's myth? A fine myth, and as an observer I must say you all carried it through with style."

The problem with the business of squashing every story into an archetypal mold is that it leaves the story and the characters themselves no room to develop a life of their own. Every detail must pertain to the Arthurian legend. If Arthur and Maria Cornish are so obviously meant to stand in for King Arthur and Guinevere, they cannot be themselves, and the same applies to the book's other characters. In effect there are no new possibilities, and any pleasure the reader may take is not the rich one of watching an unexpected pattern emerge but the thin cerebral one of seeing precut pieces fall into preordained slots. The archetypes of passion, thus called up, are not in themselves sufficient to arouse real passion.

Passion in any case was always a subject that Davies avoided. He came as close to it as he ever would in his depiction of Hector Mackilwraith's inarticulate, absurd love; as a rule, he treated sexual love nervously. His heroes—Dunstan Ramsay, David Staunton, Simon Darcourt, Francis Cornish, Jonathan Hullah in *The Cunning Man*—are an amazingly chaste group. Davies' reiterated objec-

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tions to Freudianism on the grounds of its overemphasis of sex, his oft-stated belief that sex is only one—and far from the most important—of man's many preoccupations, considered along with his awkwardness in depicting or even discussing sex in his novels, leads one to suspect that perhaps he doth protest too much. But such speculation is presumptuous and usually pointless: it should simply be said that Davies' art failed him when it came to sex.

> "I think I've had my lumps for a while. My mumps-lumps. But I'm coming round, at last. I think I'll sleep in your bed tonight."
>
> "Arthur—I'd love that. But is it wise?"
>
> "Darcourt's doctrine of optimism. Let's give it a go."
>
> And they did.

This kid-glove treatment is seriously at odds with the spirit of Rabelais with which Davies tried to infuse his Cornish trilogy, and it represents a real limitation on his part. Still, it is unfair to keep quoting from the novel that is manifestly Davies' weakest. It should be said that while the author's sexual nervousness harms those characters who are supposed to be sexually healthy, it in fact deepens those who are ambivalent, or disturbed, about sex. Characters like Dunstan Ramsay and Francis Cornish, with their harsh Calvinist backgrounds and their troubled relationships with their mothers (this last was a dynamic Davies knew at first hand) would in any case be unlikely converts to twentieth-century sexual revolution mores.

The portions of dialogue quoted above emphasize another flaw in Davies' work: his absolute inability to find individual voices for his various characters. To give him his due, he recognized his own limitations and never made the attempt, so that he at least avoided producing dialogue that is downright phony. Still, it is a little disconcerting in *The Rebel Angels*, for example, to have the youthful (female) Maria, the middle-aged (male) Darcourt, and the brilliant skeptic Parlabane all speak in the same ironic tones and elegant sentences: the tones and the sentences, one can only suspect, of the articulate and theatrically trained Davies himself.

Usually, the charge that an artist is "too intellectual" is a spurious and ignoble one, a shameful reminder of our collective distrust, as a society, of the intellect and the life of the mind. In Davies' case, however, it is a legitimate concern. His novels prove again and again that he is at his worst when drawing out an allegory or forcing his creatures into archetypal patterns, and at his best—indeed, in this sphere he is inimitable—when grappling with the contradictory, troubled Canada of his youth. Thamesville and Renfrew may have been places of misery for the young Davies, but as inspirations for Deptford and Blairlogie they are marvelous. *Murther and Walking Spirits*, his fictionalized account of his own ancestors, amply and poetically illustrates its projected theme, "How people become Canadians." Canada, Davies wrote, is "like a family—various, often unsympathetic, sometimes detestable, frequently dumb as hell—but inescapable because you are part of it and can't ever, really, get away."

Yet Davies' intellectualism is an inextricable part of his character as a writer. He is of real value in his capacity as one of those writers and thinkers who disturbs our comfortable parochialism by reminding us that our own era, beliefs, and standards should not be seen as the inevitable and wonderful culmination of centuries of striving for the light. Dunstan Ramsay's opinion is Davies' own: "The truly historical view . . . was not a tale of man's progress from barbarism or superstition to modern enlightenment, but a recognition that enlightenment had shown itself in the long story of man in a variety of guises, and that barbarism and superstition were underlying elements in the human story."

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Monsieur Pellerin's collection: a footnote to "Cézanne"

by Karen Wilkin

Among the most memorable paintings in the Museum of Modern Art's great Matisse retrospective in 1992, an exhibition full of memorable paintings, was a solemn frontal image of a bearded man seated tensely erect, hands clasped in front of him. Painted in 1916 to 1917, the period of some of Matisse's most compelling portraits, it was striking even in the company of the Beaubourg's fetching vision of the actress Greta Prozor, seated in an armchair, and the Guggenheim's stiffly upright *Italian Woman*, that strange picture in which the swooping plane of the background threatens to engulf the figure. The portrait of the bearded man was pared down to essentials: a rigid full-face figure against a dark ground, as hieratic as a Byzantine pantocrator, as implacable as an Egyptian statue. Matisse described the curve of his model's smooth, bald skull and high cheekbones with an authorative circle that irresistibly recalled both the conceptualized drawing of icons and the solar disk poised on the brow of some Egyptian deities. Color was as deceptively simple as the composition: dull blacks and earthy flesh tones, accented by the grayed whites of a neat beard, generous shirt cuffs, and a tidy collar. The man's black suit, punctuated only by the discreet flicker of a red Légion d'Honneur rosette in the lapel, all but merged with an expanse of black wall, but the elegant, sculptural head was framed and dramatized by a schematically rendered portion of a painting hanging behind him.

That the portrait was severely beautiful, inventive, and powerful, was no surprise in a Matisse of the period; neither was the way it pulsed between harsh, large-scale gesture and delicate touch, between reference and abstraction. More unexpected was the double characterization of the sitter as emblematic of an entire class of affluent men and as a particular, vivid individual; despite the picture's stylization, a distinct personality, not simply a generic magnate circa World War I, was conjured up by Matisse's economical drawing and pared-down modeling. You'd recognize this lean, immaculately tailored, forceful man anywhere. Who was he? Auguste Pellerin, a manufacturer and collector, the label said.

In the version of the Matisse show seen in Paris, this portrait was joined by a more overtly pleasant, more naturalistic incarnation, a good, but not great painting in which the same alert, frontal figure, placed slightly farther away from the viewer, was embedded in a seductively colored setting full of anecdotal renderings of books, objets d'art, and the accoutrements of an executive desk. The protagonist appeared no less elegant, but younger, more relaxed. This picture, I discovered, was Matisse's first effort at painting Pellerin and had been rejected by the sitter. Such rejection was not unheard of; when Matisse accepted a portrait commission, he customarily gave his sitters the right to refuse the finished picture, without paying, so that he would

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not be inhibited by their desires, and they sometimes took him up on the offer. What was surprising was that the fierce portrait with the black ground *was* accepted by Pellerin. (The collector is supposed to have later decided that he had been wrong about the first picture and to have tried to acquire both at a discounted price; Matisse refused and ultimately received full payment—double the original fee—for the two canvases.) That the preferred second picture was infinitely more rigorous than the first—more firmly structured and more abstract—suggested that Pellerin was no ordinary collector.

He wasn't. Born in Paris in 1852, Pellerin's fortune came from the manufacture of margarine—of all things—in France, Germany, England, and the Scandinavian countries; his relations with Scandinavia were so close that he served as consul general for Norway in Paris from 1906 until his death in 1929. Pellerin's collection apparently began conventionally enough, as befitted a wealthy entrepreneur of his generation, with porcelain, crystal and glass objects, and paintings by such eminently respectable figures as Henner and Corot. But he soon sold his initial acquisitions, including his Corots, to buy Impressionist works. He wasn't alone, of course. Other progressive collectors, admittedly few of them French, were doing more or less the same thing about that time. Think of the exemplary collections put together by the Havemeyers or the Potter Palmers in the U.S. or even by Pellerin's exceptional compatriot, Count Isaac de Camondo, in France. What sets Pellerin apart from his contemporaries is his evolving taste for the difficult picture, a taste that led him not only to acquire paintings and drawings by such artists as Renoir, Degas, Monet, Pissarro, Berthe Morisot, Sisley, and Manet well before 1900, but to acquire a surprising number of surprising pictures.

Pellerin seems to have been particularly interested in Impressionist figure paintings, rather than the ravishing landscapes that attracted many of his fellow enthusiasts. His Renoirs, for example, included *Bather with a Terrier* (1870, Museu de Arte de São Paulo), a voluptuous standing nude, oddly flanked by a pollarded willow and a partly glimpsed, fully dressed female companion located in a space best described as ambiguous. (The picture was most recently seen in New York in the Metropolitan's *Origins of Impressionism*). Another of Pellerin's Renoirs, *Portrait of Rapha* (1871, private collection), or at least its lower portion, is the painting visible behind his head in both of the Matisse portraits. (Just how Matisse dissected and compressed elements of the Renoir in his pictures, especially the second, is a subject for another article.) In many ways *Portrait of Rapha* is a typical Impressionist picture of the period. The full length, fully clad female figure holding a Japanese fan has close relatives in the work of Manet, Monet, and even Whistler. But in many ways, too, *Rapha* is an atypical Renoir; paint handling in the portrait is unusually dense and vigorous, while the whole composition of pleated cream-colored dress, birdcage, potted plants, and trellised wallpaper seems curiously angular, unstable, in comparison to Renoir's more harmonious, rhythmically structured works of the period.

Pellerin's Sisley, a view of flood waters, now in the Musée d'Orsay, while good, was fairly predictable, but his Manets were astonishing. In addition to a large number of bold, slashing figure drawings (and a couple of lovingly observed studies of cats) Pellerin owned *Luncheon in the Studio* (1868, Bayerische Staats-gemäldesammlungen, Munich), that enigmatic conflation of bourgeois dining room and studio set-up that serves as background for a portrait of Léon Leenhoff, Manet's son (or stepson, depending on whose version you believe). It's an urgent, confrontational picture; everything presses forward, particularly the velvety black jacket on the adolescent boy, who leans against the table covered with the remnants of a meal, his back to an older man still seated there. (Both, inexplicably, in terms of the implied narrative, are wearing hats.) The boy's re-

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laxed attitude, however, is completely subverted by the way the edge of the canvas cuts him off at the knees. It's irresistible, of course, to think about *Luncheon in the Studio* in relation to Matisse's portrait of the collector who owned it; the restrained black-grey-cream palette of Manet's picture—along with the play of opaque, black jacket and pale face and linen, not to mention the frontal, demanding quality of the composition—oddly anticipates Matisse's second portrait of Pellerin. Is that why he preferred it to the more apparently likable first version?

Pellerin also owned a group of Manet's paintings of women, including the tautly composed, voluptuous *Nana* (1877, Kunsthalle, Hamburg), a reprisal of the theme of the courtesan that the painter first explored in *Olympia*. Submitted to the Salon of 1877 and rejected, *Nana* is based on Zola's famous character, not, it turns out, as she appears in the eponymous novel, which had not yet been written, but as she figures in an earlier story. *Nana* must have made an interesting companion to Pellerin's Renoirs. Together, the three large-scale pictures of standing women made a piquant trio: Manet's young Nana in her underwear, powdering herself under the watchful gaze of her "protector"; Renoir's nude bather, her worldly origins signaled by her discarded clothing and fashionable little dog; and his Rapha, elegantly clad, but hardly innocent, a caged bird contemplating a cage full of little birds. (Rapha was the mistress of Edmond Maître—the man playing the piano in Bazille's well-known painting of his friends in his studio. Even if Pellerin didn't know specifically who she was, like any sophisticated man of his generation he could have easily deciphered the implications of Renoir's portrait.)

What is perhaps most impressive, even in the context of this impressive selection, Pellerin owned yet another extraordinary picture of a young woman, Manet's last masterpiece, *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (1881–82, Courtauld Institute Galleries, London). A good deal has been written about the picture's sociological subtext, about the brilliant demimondaines who frequented the Folies, the most fashionable café-concert of the period, about the availability of the serving girls at such spectacles, and about the implied transaction, beyond the purchase of a drink, enacted by Manet's barmaid and her customer, the man whom we see only reflected in the mirror behind her. No doubt it is all true, but what makes the work a key painting in the history of Impressionism and of modernism itself is not its subject matter. The picture's dislocated, deliberately irrational reflections and disorienting structure suggest that Manet's chief concern was not to comment on the social mores of late nineteenth-century Paris, but to probe the mysteries of perception itself, not by rendering faithfully what was to be seen, but by making the viewer ponder the nature of seeing. Did Pellerin acquire the work because of its nominal subject—a handsome young woman of a particular class, gloriously painted, in an evocative setting that included some dazzling still-life passages—or did he acquire it because of its visual rigor?

There's no simple or definitive answer, of course. Many of the works in Pellerin's collection suggest that he was anything but immune to highly charged, suggestive subjects, but there's also ample evidence that he responded to material and formal resonance more than he did engaging narrative. His Manets, for example, also included that disjunctive urban panorama, *The Universal Exposition of 1867* (1867, Nasjonalgalleriet, Oslo), a view from the broad terrace punctuated with not quite related groups of agile figures. The most persuasive proof lies in the evolution of the collection. Pellerin eventually disposed of most of his Impressionist pictures, admittedly for a very handsome sum. The Manets alone, sold in 1910 to a triumverate of important dealers, Bernheim-Jeune, Cassirer, and Durand-Ruel, are supposed to have brought one million francs. Some Impressionist works remained in the collection, of course. As the Matisse

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portraits attest, Pellerin still owned at least one of his Renoirs as late as 1917. What did the margarine manufacturer substitute for his carefully assembled collection of extraordinary Impressionist pictures? Toward the end of his life, he acquired works by more "modern" artists—Vuillard, Maurice Denis, and Matisse; in addition to the two Matisse portraits, he acquired *The Three Sisters* (1917, Musée de l'Orangerie), a deceptively casual, lushly arabesque composition of a trio of elegantly dressed young women. But Pellerin's real motive for selling his Manets and related works was to concentrate almost exclusively on the art of that grittiest and most uningratiating of painters, Cézanne. The margarine tycoon became the greatest collector of Cézanne's paintings in France, amassing more than ninety works spanning the artist's entire career.

Pellerin bought his first Cézannes from Vollard, the renowned dealer who organized the artist's first one-man exhibition in 1895. In 1903, Pellerin bought six of the nine Cézannes in the sale of Zola's collection and the following year, another seven paintings, through the auspices of the distinguished firm of Bernheim-Jeune. By 1912, Pellerin had acquired twenty-nine more works by Cézanne, and he continued to enlarge his holdings, with pictures from various periods, until 1925 when he bought his last painting by the artist, *Large Pine and Red Earth* (1890–95, Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg). Many of Pellerin's pictures had distinguished provenances. In addition to the group that had belonged to Cézanne's boyhood friend Zola, there were others from such perceptive collectors as the celebrated Dr. Gachet—Cézanne's friend, as well as Van Gogh's—Gauguin, and Pissarro. What is perhaps more impressive, Pellerin was the first owner of a great number of the Cézannes he selected.

In his memoirs, Vollard plays tribute to Pellerin's prescience. The dealer recounts that when he first exhibited some of Cézanne's nudes, in that pioneering one-man show of 1895, even "those most interested in the exhibition" urged him to take them out of the window of his gallery, declaring that the public was not yet ready for them. Reluctantly, Vollard turned the nudes to the wall: ". . . but one visitor, turning the paintings around, discovered *Leda and the Swan* and bought it on the spot. And so the first nude to be sold during the exhibition was acquired by M. Auguste Pellerin." Unlike Renoir's *Bather with a Terrier*, there's nothing conventionally lovely or seductive about Cézanne's *Leda*, neither in figure type, drawing, or paint handling, so there is nothing ambiguous about Pellerin's response to the picture, as there might have been to his more overtly appealing Renoirs and Manets, their formal excellence notwithstanding. *Leda* came to have company, however, in Pellerin's collection, which eventually included two versions of *Bathsheba*, a nameless reclining nude, a standing nude known as *La Toilette* (c. 1878), now in the Barnes Collection, and more than half a dozen of the small groups of bathers—among other related images. Clearly Pellerin chose them for different reasons than he had chosen Renoir's *Bather with a Terrier*, incontrovertible proof of his changing taste.

The importance of Pellerin's great collection was recognized early on. In the celebrated Cézanne retrospective mounted at the 1907 Salon d'Automne to commemorate the painter's death the previous year—an exhibition that arguably changed the course of modernism by offering a potent example to a younger generation that included Picasso, Braque, and Matisse—almost half of the fifty-seven works exhibited were identified as coming from the Pellerin collection. Roger Fry was one of Pellerin's greatest admirers and included him among the Honorary Committee of the pivotal exhibition, *Manet and the Post-Impressionists*, that he organized at the Grafton Galleries in the winter of 1910 to 1911. Fry's seminal book on Cézanne, published in 1927, grew out of an unrealized plan to publish "a complete series of reproductions of all the

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Cézannes in M. Pellerin's collection" with an accompanying text by Fry. Of the fifty-five works illustrated in his book, Fry listed thirty-six belonging to Pellerin and discussed many of them in detail. They included the tense *Still Life with Soup Tureen* (1877, Musée d'Orsay), with its decisive thrust to one side of the canvas, and its robust basket of fruit, angled, like the tureen itself, oddly away from the viewer, along with the celebrated *Still Life with a Basket* (1888–90, Musée d'Orsay), with its restless shifting of scale and relentless warping of space.

Fry was quite right when he wrote, in the introduction to his book, that knowing Pellerin's collection was essential to an understanding of Cézanne's development. The catalogue of works reads like a curator's wish list for an ideal exhibition. Among the portraits there were five of the painter's Uncle Dominique, including the Musée d'Orsay's gesticulating *Uncle Dominique as a Lawyer* and the Metropolitan's *Man with a Cotton Cap*—the one with the blue "bonnet" and yellow jacket—both from 1866. There was the portrait of the artist's father reading a newspaper in a flowered armchair (c. 1866, National Gallery, Washington) and the haunting *Achille Emperaire* (1869–70, Musée d'Orsay), with his noble head and undersized body, a very different presence in the same chair. (Pellerin even owned the thickly painted little still life that appears on the wall behind Cézanne's father.) The collection also included the Metropolitan's marvelous *Madame Cézanne in a Yellow Armchair* (1893–95), a picture that both sums up everything Cézanne was capable of as a portrait painter and points to most of Matisse. The figure of the artist's wife, in her red dress built of broad patches of paint, tilts under the pressure of the painter's unrelenting gaze; only the opposed swoop of a familiar tapestry drape and the vertical plane of the fireplace keep her upright and centered. In addition, the collection included two other portrait masterpieces, both now in the Musée d'Orsay, *Woman with a Coffeepot* (1895) and *Portrait of Gustave Geffroy* (1895–96)—the one in which the seated critic is jammed between the tipped plane of a desk strewn with open books and a wall of packed bookcases, an important work in the evolution of Cubism and perhaps another precedent for Matisse's portrait. Pellerin owned several of Cézanne's self-portraits as well, including the peculiarly bulky one, chin tucked in, with a ground of cream and rose spots (c. 1875, private collection) that is one of the standouts in the current Cézanne retrospective.[1]

The presence of such works should alert us to what really distinguished Pellerin's collection—not its comprehensiveness, but its excellence and, moreover, its excellence of a particular kind. Pellerin owned a good many of Cézanne's most ambitious, most achieved pictures from all periods throughout his career: the great *Card Players* (1890–92), for example, now in the Barnes Collection, the familiar *Still Life with Onions* (1890–94, Musée d'Orsay), with its ravishing harmony of rose, mauve, and blue-grey, and an important 1890 *Mont Sainte-Victoire* (Musée d'Orsay)—the one with the big pine tree on the left and a broad, geometric wall that emphatically underscores the bulk of the mountain. Pellerin owned, too, Cézanne's most ambitious late painting: the unstable, pulsing *Large Bathers* (1904–06) now in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, arguably the culmination of Cézanne's lifelong quest "to do Poussin over from nature." But in addition to these exemplary "signature" works, Pellerin owned large numbers of quirky, downright eccentric pictures, particularly from Cézanne's early years, paintings that still possess the capacity to startle, even to disturb, almost a century after the artist's death.

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1 Karen Wilkin's review of "Cézanne" appeared in our December 1995 issue. The show, which began at the Grand Palais, Paris (September 30, 1995–January 7, 1996), has moved to the Tate Gallery, London (February 8–April 8, 1996) and will continue on to the Philadelphia Museum of Art (May 30–August 18, 1996).

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Picture after picture among Pellerin's Cézannes stamps itself out for its edginess, its uncomfortable space, its intensity. Not only did the collector respond enthusiastically to the early portraits with their aggressive drawing and loaded, almost brutal surfaces, but he seems to have had a boundless appetite for the most passionate, even the most forbidding of the early pictures: the slightly clumsy interiors and genre scenes, the supercharged allegories, the unnerving scenes of violence and sexual ambiguity. The number of Cézanne's unlovable, tough early works in Pellerin's collection cannot be explained simply by his manifest desire to own representative, high quality works from all stages of the painter's evolution. Pellerin must have responded to their mystery and their heat. Not only did he own two versions of the steamy *Temptation of Saint Anthony* (1870, E. G. Bührle Foundation, Zurich, and 1875–77, Musée d'Orsay), and both versions of the slightly kinky *Afternoon in Naples* (1875–77, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, and private collection), but he owned, as well, a group of early pictures that are arguably the most compelling and enigmatic of this compelling and enigmatic series: the Italianate Delacroix-inspired fantasy, *The Orgy* (1867–72); the brutal bedroom scene, *A Modern Olympia* (1869–70), both still in private collections; and the disquieting *Idyll* (1870, Musée d'Orsay), a version of *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* in which the clothed male figures studiously ignore the women. Pellerin owned, too, the superb *Battle of Love* (1880, private collection), which once belonged to Pissarro, a scene of classical ambitions, rhythmic stroking, and thinly disguised strangeness (what *is* that black dog doing to the couple on the right?). As I said, he was no ordinary collector.

Ultimately, of course, it is impossible to know why Pellerin acquired what he did when he did, but it's intriguing to speculate from the evidence of the collection about the unifying links that determined his choices. It would be fascinating to reassemble the works once selected by this exacting eye, this highly individual taste. The Metropolitan did that not long ago for the Havemeyers, admittedly major benefactors of the museum. Perhaps the Musée d'Orsay could be persuaded to organize a proper homage to M. Pellerin. That's a show the critic in me would love to see and the curator would love to work on.

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Scenes of a Russian winter

by William Jay Smith

From January until May 1981, I was a Fulbright professor at Moscow State University, lecturing on contemporary American poetry and occupying with my wife, Sonja, two rooms (a so-called *blok*) in the university complex overlooking the city. It was an unusual time to be there: I became something of an anomaly as a poet and an American cultural representative when the United States had cut off all cultural exchange because of the Afghan War. As a result, I was treated like a rock star with large crowds lining up to attend my poetry readings in Moscow and the other cities Sonja and I visited in between my weekly lectures. I began at the time to put down these impressions of Russian life. But when I returned to Moscow in 1990 for the centenary of Pasternak, so much had changed that I put them aside. Now that Communism is making a comeback and Russians are viewing nostalgically what to many, even with its severe constraints, seems in retrospect a happier time, I have the sense that much of what I saw is showing through like the outlines of an old picture that has been superficially painted over. Here then is how it all looked fifteen years ago.

Black and white checkerboard

When the Marquis de Custine visited Russia in 1839, he said, with respect to the Russian seasons, that there are night and day and two twilights. I had been to Russia three times since 1970, but each time it had been at twilight, once in the spring twilight (May) and twice in the autumn twilight (October). When I arrived for the fourth time on January 5, 1981, as a Fulbright lecturer at the School of Journalism of Moscow State University, I realized at once that I had come in the middle of the Russian night. The sky was gray and overcast; the thin straight trunks of the birches along the highway into Moscow from the Sheremetevo Airport stood out in the dark air like the smudged tines of old silver forks.

Although the winter we experienced (we stayed until May 9) was typical in its grayness, it was unusual in that there was little snow and it was never very cold. As it was, the snow that fell stayed in place or was scooped up into high dirty drifts that only accentuated the gloom.

There was so little color in the world around us during our Russian winter that, gazing from the windows of our university rooms high in the Lenin Hills toward the distant gray outlines of the city, I sometimes wondered if I had become colorblind or was seeing the world suddenly as dogs apparently see it: in black and white. Black iron railings everywhere stood out sharply against the mounds of snow; the fir trees in the park around the university rose like so many dark-coated sentinels along the way, their branches, snow-tipped arms extended to block the path. There were only two or

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three heavy snowfalls and it was often warm enough for the snow to start to melt. The resultant slush would then freeze into brownish-gray fringes along the snow drifts lining the black streets. The water from the snow that had melted on the walks by the Metro became treacherous glare ice, its black surface resembling an old mirror that sparkled but gave back no image. The paths across vacant lots were so many strands of black thread winding crookedly through a dirty white tufted fabric.

The black newsprint on the copies of *Pravda* spread out on the bulletin boards at street corners were echoed by the black ink-like blotches encircling the birch trees in the neighboring parks. Outside the city, the snow appeared to level the already level ground of the countryside. The omnipresent magpie seems to be the totem bird of this landscape, and one can understand why it is said to bear magic things on its tail. When on a winter day it rises, all black and white, from black bushes along the road and settles down on a neighboring hummock, the entire countryside appears to rise and fall with it.

On the black and white checkerboard of the streets the ice-cream stands, perched along the curbs like derelict phone booths in the snow drifts, provided the only bit of color. Ice cream (*morozhine*) is one of the delights of Moscow, but now the abandoned stands with the metallic texture of their pale blue exteriors made a cold day seem all the colder. Another note of color, and an equally sorrowful one, was provided by the pale green booth of the Militia, the police. Resting on long white-metal arms thrust out at forty-five degree angles over important intersections, these windowed observation posts looked for all the world like giant plastic cups in the hands of robots. The Militiamen themselves, when not encapsulated in these posts, stood directing traffic in their gray uniforms and long gray greatcoats. Their presence was made all the more imposing by the knee-high black felt boots they wore. These are the famous felt *valenki* of the Russian peasant, the warmest things imaginable but not the easiest in which to maneuver. Over them the Militiamen wear heavy rubbers to keep their feet warm and dry. When they walk they waddle like ducks with black-bandaged legs. I followed two of them through an underpass one day, their peculiar gait even more hobbled by bottles of vodka protruding from under their coats. In their *valenki* the militiamen cannot run, but then they do not have to. Motorists, aware that the slightest traffic violation can mean the loss of a driver's license, are not difficult to keep in line.

A cold Moscow street becomes even colder when one waits for a taxi. One must watch carefully because not only are taxis scarce but they are also almost invisible. They are a pale sickly lemony green, and to show that they are unoccupied and ready for hire, they have a small green light about the size of a quarter turned on in the upper left-hand corner of the windshield. It can be tantalizing to seek out this glaring green eye as it veers through traffic, especially when it zooms down on one only to zoom off again because the driver has forgotten to turn it off and is not really interested in picking up passengers.

Moscow taxis have on their doors the most discreet markings I have encountered on any vehicle anywhere. These markings, intended to differentiate them from private cars, consist of a pattern of several rows of small black squares beneath the window on the front door. This checkerboard pattern, so many tiny Medieval musical notes faintly but distinctly summing up the winter theme, seemed totally incongruous and out of place until I decided that they had come straight from the old icons. The cloaks on the extended arms of many of the saints in these old paintings reveal the black-and-white checkerboard world of a Russian winter. How strange it was now to see bits of that checkerboard fly past.

The green eye of the taxi is not the only bright-colored light encountered on a snow-swept night. The windows of the

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buses frost over when it is really cold, and one has the impression of being enclosed, locked in a space vehicle rumbling through the firmament, able to see nothing but a white haze. One woman Fulbright professor got on a bus in the Lenin Hills on a cold day, and having no idea where she was with the windows frosted over and unable to speak a word of Russian, she sat, terrified and numb, until the bus, after its hour-long circuit, returned to its starting place at the university. With luck, through the frosted windows, a passenger can sometimes spot bright red neon letters that seem to beckon warmly across the snow. I recall with what excitement I first noticed such letters only to find that they spelled out M-E-A-T and designated a butchershop, where I knew little of the product they so strongly announced would be found. Another frequent red neon sign is "РЕСТОРАН," which in the capital Cyrillic letters looks to the Western eye so exotic and then turns out to be simply "RESTAURANT," where behind long dingy lace curtains in high-ceilinged rooms there are many diners and not much food.

Since we arrived in Moscow just after New Year's, we found displayed all around the university the figure of Father Winter, a tramp all in black and white with a clown's white face and a bright cherry-red nose. Red is, of course, the color that Russians live with the most, the color of their flag, their banners and pennants, the symbol of triumphant Communism, the color at the heart of Red Square, where a red star glows at night on the Kremlin towers and Lenin lies in his mausoleum in his red and black tie. Red is the color of their party, their Army, remembered at every moment in so many ways with streets named for it all across the country. Every enterprise, every factory, every school, every hospital has its red corner, its local propaganda room. Red is the room where workers, parents, patients, and schoolchildren refresh their belief in Communism. Red is the color of their pride, their faith, their life. And naturally even in the black and white checkerboard of winter, red is never forgotten.

Red is indeed the only color permitted in prominent display. Dropped from the tops of buildings, flung across streets and avenues, hung from bridges, draped over walls are the huge red letters of the slogans: "Glory to the Soviet People, Builders of Communism," "Communism Will Triumph," "Long Live Brotherhood," and "Glory to Work." During the week of the Twenty-sixth Congress in April, all Moscow became a package wrapped in red. I watched crews in trucks all over the city carefully affixing the slogans and the stars, and then a week later taking them all down again, except, of course, for the main ones, storing them away until the next great patriotic event. The university, which at night was ordinarily so dark it seemed to have been blacked out for wartime, was suddenly ablaze with lights. The ornate lantern in the courtyard below our windows, which was never lighted, was shining as it had apparently been meant to shine.

The *dezhurnaya* (floor lady) on our floor rolled out a red carpet with green floral designs identical with the uneven bits in our rooms and in offices throughout the city. Her carpet, which she kept stored away, reached barely two-thirds of the way down the hall. The effect was to give the place that unfinished look that Moscow always seemed to take on when special effort had been made to spruce it up quickly.

When first in the Soviet Union, I gazed carefully at each red-lettered slogan, studying its message. After some weeks, like so many Russians who ignore them completely, I found that they no longer drew my eye. As with the blatant vulgar advertising of the West, I was simply blotting out these strident messages. But would it have been so easy to do so if there had really been much life in the color with which they were presented? The red is far from vibrant. The snow over which these banners were unfurled appeared somehow to have mixed with the red, giving it a washed-out, chalky, ashen look. A good many Russians, one is told, are "radish Communists"—red on the

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outside, white on the inside. The white of that inside seemed here to have mixed with the outside red of these banners, and the effect was a bloodless red. What a far cry it was from the red of the early icons, the passionate, saintly, martyred red that incorporated all the light of this world and that imagined in the next. I could understand why the vibrant paintings by Andrei Rublev were in the most inaccessible corners of the galleries and museums, where most Russians would never see them.

There is nothing more depressing than to come late at night into the lobby of a modern hotel in Moscow, one's eyes a black and white blur from the winter world outside, and to find an old crone in her drab dustcoat mopping up, dragging slowly across a dazzling marble floor a huge filthy uneven floor-cloth as if it were all of Asia.

Second part of day

Anyone who goes to the Soviet Union in any sort of official or semi-official capacity is always looked after by a man or woman who acts as guide, interpreter, and general adviser. The picture that is usually given of these advisers—as part of the long arm of the KGB, inspecting one's every activity, bugging one's telephone, scribbling reports on all that one says and does—is not entirely accurate. Or, at least, it did not prove to be so in our case.

Watching over Sonja and me was a little woman whom I shall call Natasha. She operated in such a fashion that we felt we were guiding her around, getting her on the right train, helping her to find her way to places she had never been before, and, in general, protecting her from the daily difficulties of Soviet life.

Natasha was a young instructor in the School of Journalism, where she lectured, although it was never clear to me what she lectured on or how she was able to lecture at all. The one function that she performed at my lectures—and this she performed perfectly—was to gather up whatever books I had brought to show my students and to lock them up safely in the Dean's office so that no one would ever see them again.

She was a wisp of a creature, short, with straw-colored hair, delicate features and eyes that seemed half hidden away, timidly venturing out from time to time to face the world. She usually wore a black woolen cap with stray tasseled bits of wool that fell in all directions. Beneath it her elfin face peered out as if from under a mound of tar-streaked leaves. She had been married to a Tass reporter, from whom she was now divorced, and had spent a year in New York, but her stay there had had little effect on her English, which was the strangest I had ever encountered in any Russian.

Each time she telephoned, she would say in a tentative, apologetic way, as though lifting her head to shake off the leaves:

"I meet you second part of day."

When she spoke the words, her breath was a breeze gently touching a series of delicate brass wind-chimes:

"I–meet–you–second–part–of–day."

The effect was totally Oriental. Natasha became the only Russian I have met before or since who spoke English with a Chinese accent.

The first time I heard her, I had no idea what she meant. And then I realized that in Russian the word for "afternoon" is literally "second part of day." And when she pronounced, as she always did, that literal English equivalent, I had the impression that we were to meet her not only at some time late in the afternoon but in some remote place near the Great Wall of China.

Natasha became for us "Second-Part-of-Day." If Sonja announced to me in front of friends at the American Embassy that "Second-Part-of-Day is coming," they would look at her as if she had suddenly taken leave of her senses. But I knew immediately that Natasha was on her way, although it might be some time before she turned up. Her relation to time was as tentative as her relation to language.

There is no word for "efficiency" in Russian. I listened bug-eyed one day to a Rus-

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sian acquaintance who explained that the reason for the lack of the concept was that everything had gone along smoothly and efficiently until the Mongol invasion, from which, after some four centuries, Russia had still not recovered. I wondered at times if the speech and behavior of Natasha showed the lingering effects of that early disaster.

We became really very fond of her despite, or perhaps because of, her weaknesses. She was charming in her doll-like way. She seemed to drown in reality, and there was something desperately affecting in the picture of her drifting through time and space like Ophelia on the stream. The only problem was that we often felt that she was about to drag us with her, and then we had to take steps so as not to be set adrift ourselves.

The first time we came to the full realization that Natasha might be leading us astray and even over the bank was when we rushed around frantically in the station with her trying to find our train to Vladimir, only to discover that we were in the wrong station. When we finally made our way across town to the correct station, our train, on which we had first-class reservations, had long since departed, and we had to take tickets on a later and far less comfortable one.

We retired to the station restaurant for a three-hour wait and attempted to comfort "Second-Part-of-Day," assuring her that it made no difference to us which train we took.

Railway station restaurants in all countries are sad places but none anywhere has ever had quite the constellated gloom of that particular one on that day. It was vast and empty, and the flimsy lace curtains that covered the long windows seemed to be giant fishnets that had dragged our lovely Ophelia to shore. She was trembling and the blue veins showed through her white skin like the marks on the wings of a moth that had strayed too near the flame.

Realizing that desperate measures were needed, I summoned the waitress and ordered vodka and caviar.

Those essential delicacies were not even then always available in Moscow restaurants but in this case they were. And fortunately my Russian publisher had just provided me with enough roubles to afford them.

We lifted our glasses and slowly broke through the gloom.

We toasted the Soviet Union and the United States: we drank to peace and to nuclear disarmament, to Russian poetry and to American poetry.

Natasha slowly began to cheer up.

Our toasts continued in a crescendo of inconsequentiality:

"To Moscow!"

"To Washington!"

"To Odessa!"

"To St. Louis!"

"To the Trans-Siberian Railroad!"

"To the Norfolk and Western!"

"To all the trains we've ever taken!"

"To all the trains we've missed!"

"To Second Part of Day—best part of day!"

"To the Great Wall of China!"

Natasha looked blank but after a while she was her old self again, thoroughly revived.

Our high spirits dissipated when we finally boarded our train. It stopped at every village between Moscow and Vladimir. The air on board was thick and heavy, and we were jolted along, crushed between bundle-laden passengers for more than three hours. When we arrived, the car that was to have met us had departed, and we had to make our way on foot to our hotel, which was not the luxurious one in Suzdal, to which we were supposed to have gone but a much less comfortable one at the center of Vladimir.

Leaving the train, we discovered that the Mongol invasion or some later catastrophe had left Natasha with what appeared to be dyslexia. Shortly before we arrived, she had asked her neighbor the way to our hotel. Sonja, seated next to them, listened to the man explain the way, and although she understands little Russian, she saw him point

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several times to the right and then straight ahead. But when we arrived, Natasha headed immediately to the left with us at her heels. As the crowd thinned out and we appeared to be forging off into the bleak northern wastes, Sonja suggested that we return and go where the rest of the crowd was going. And so we went back to the station, to the right and straight up the dark icy steps to the center of Vladimir.

This experience should have prepared us for Natasha's constant veering in the wrong direction, but somehow we were so under the spell of her sweetness that we tended always to forget. When we set out for Leningrad a few weeks later, we arranged to meet her at one of the principal subway stations in Moscow. She explained in detail that we would rendezvous at the bottom of the stairs on the left end of the platform. As we got off the train and struggled through the crowd, Sonja said that she was almost certain that she had glimpsed Natasha whisking off to the right. At the designated spot under the signs that had been carefully described to us, I told her that she must have been mistaken. When twenty minutes went by and we began to worry again about missing our train, we walked down to the far right. There on the opposite end of the platform, on a bench behind a marble pillar, sat "Second-Part-of-Day," in her tar-stained leafy headdress, chewing on an orange, that great treasure of the Russian winter, and staring happily into space.

Cabbages and commissars

Images of cabbages and commissars keep recurring to me as I review in my mind that winter of 1981 in Moscow.

However well prepared one may be beforehand, one sees everywhere in the Soviet Union things both gigantic and improbable. Nothing makes sense, and after a while one begins to accept each irrational bit as part of a nonsensical scheme that makes sense, if at all, only in terms of itself. Everything is huge, swollen. Someone once remarked that even a barbershop in Russia is gigantic. Restaurants in railway stations are enormous with ceilings high enough to contain two-story buildings. In one such vast and empty Intourist restaurant in central Asia, I sat one day with my guide staring at the seven or eight huge refrigerators that lined one wall. No waiter came to take our order. The only one anywhere sat at a table in one corner of the vast room cutting small square paper napkins into minute triangles, stuffing them all carefully into a single glass. Another improbable scene: outside the Cathedral of Vladimir, I saw distributed out on the grass fifteen toilet bowls that two old crones were attempting to stack one on the other. Why they were there far from any hotel or toilet facility no one seemed to know; they were just part of the general scheme of things.

On a dark empty street on the outskirts of Moscow at another time, I saw a pile of cabbages reaching up as high as the second floor of the building and spilling out across the sidewalk and halfway across the street. There were no trucks anywhere. This was not a market area and the street was deserted. The cabbages for some reason had been dumped there and there they waited. There was something obscene about this pile, suggesting the aftermath of some surreal, bloodless slaughter—the pale, frozen-green, expressionless heads lopped off and rolling into the gutter.

In April during the all-important session of the Twenty-sixth Congress of the Communist Party, we were treated at every moment to visions of what appeared to be the greatest collection of commissars ever assembled. On the television screen, we were served up every hour of the day or night views of their square expressionless faces and their great bemedaled chests. As I entered the lobby of the Writers' Union one evening, I saw close-up a small concentration of these leaders. Everyone present, civilian and military, was covered with medals, ribbons, and stars. Gold flashed on every chest and bosom, and gold teeth in the broad smiling faces added to the maca-

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bre carnival atmosphere. One particular figure caught my eye. A little woman as broad as she was high (and she was almost a dwarf) had row after row of medals pinned closely together and slanted slightly upward, the row beneath it following immediately below, and on and on so that the tasseled and starred pendants reached down to the tops of her fur boots. On her head she wore a dark fur hat beneath which her slanted Oriental eyes and her gold teeth sparkled. With the combination of bright-colored, medaled carapace and the fur top and bottom she looked like some strange combination of crustacean and plump, furred mammal that had just surfaced somewhere on the Siberian ice. And yet here she seemed perfectly at home.

The Writers' Union oddly enough seemed the right place for a display of medals. On the staircase leading up to the auditorium there, one was reminded of their importance. On the first landing were displayed row after row of photographs of lesser-known writers wearing here and there only an occasional medal. On the second landing were the better-known writers, many of them much decorated. On the third and highest level were displayed the military writers, their chests festooned with decorations. Could it be that the surest way to literary success in this strange country was to join the Soviet Army?

The Army certainly seemed everywhere. No Soviet citizen is allowed to forget the importance of the Communist party and none can even briefly put aside the thought of the country's tremendous sacrifice in World War II, the Great Patriotic War. I once turned on the television in the mid-afternoon and found that one channel offered a Russian Army chorus singing patriotic songs, another an operetta concerned with female troops, the third a war film, of which there is an endless supply. Judging by the films I saw, nothing ever went wrong in the Soviet Army, but there was much that did in the army of the enemy. A scene that turned up in several films seemed to take on a symbolic significance. A Russian soldier, either a prisoner or one at the end of his resources, sat staring at a glass of vodka on top of which rested a single slice of black bread. The bread and the vodka represented, I presume, the nourishment, both physical and moral, that sustained the country in wartime. Bread and vodka are both products of grain, and grain in the Soviet Union is, of course, all-important. Even though the country had had one of the worst grain harvests in its history in 1980, the television news each evening showed threshing machines in various parts of the country moving majestically through rich fields of wheat. One particularly ironic scene that kept coming back week after week was that of the lovely fields of peaceful waving grain shown in the reports from Afghanistan.

Walls and fences

"Something there is that doesn't love a wall," Robert Frost wrote, and the line goes very well in Russian. And yet there is something in Russia that seems to love a wall, for Russians from the very beginning have been walling things in and walling things out. That is not very different from all of Europe, but while in western Europe the walls have come down or at least easy access is allowed through them, in Russia the walls appear not only to remain but new ones are going up all the time.

Every old Russian city has its *kremlin* or fortress. The first wooden walls of the Kremlin in Moscow were built by Prince Yuri Dolgoruky, the founder of the city. The wood was later replaced by limestone to protect the Kremlin from fires. Moscow became known at the time as a sacred city, the city of "white walls." The area between the Kremlin and the present Boulevard Ring was known as the "white town." It was an area fortified with brick walls and twenty-eight towers and gates. Early Moscow consisted of a system of concentric fortifications. The walls of the Kremlin are now a mile and a half in circumference and in

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some places sixty-five feet high and ten to twenty feet thick. The Kremlin is nearly pentagonal. The nucleus of St. Petersburg was likewise a fortress built on a small hexagonal island in the Neva.

Going down into the city from the Lenin Hills, one was reminded that it was the Italians who were brought in to teach the Russians how to make mortar and who organized plants to make bricks. Along both sides of the road below the university are great cream-colored walls with iron-grilled gates, all very Italianate in appearance, and beyond them great cream-colored mansions, the domains of officialdom. President Nixon stayed in one of these villas on his visit to Moscow.

Where the walls stop, the fences begin. Every little *dacha* in the countryside is surrounded by a wooden fence, usually unpainted. We became fully aware of the importance of fences at Peredelkino, the writers' colony near Moscow. Here every *dacha* is surrounded by its wooden fence. Usually like the fences of the little old country houses, they are makeshift, unpainted affairs, but sometimes they are quite substantial. The higher the fence, the more important the person. In a certain section of Peredelkino, the fences are very high and thick and painted a dark blue-green: these enclose the *dachas* of party officials. The dark green fences are quite forbidding, gloomy and depressing in aspect. The color was one that I knew well: it was exactly the same green that had been used for the trim of all the barracks and quarters and fences on the United States Army post on which I had been brought up. These *dachas* would have fitted perfectly into that old American Army décor: the only difference was that on an American Army post the inhabitant's name and rank would have been affixed in black lettering on a trim white board to each green fence. Here, in this closed society, the title, along with all the accoutrements of power, were kept carefully hidden.

It is odd to see one of these tiny *dachas* out in the middle of nowhere with no other building for miles around, completely fenced in and looking like a segment of a child's toy village that had just been plunked down there. One comes on these little houses on the outskirts of Moscow smack up against high-rise apartment buildings, their snaggle-tooth fences made up of odd pieces of unpainted lumber. Beside such an apartment, I have even seen a great green wooden fence around a small plot of land being used as a skating rink.

In Moscow iron railings are everywhere, enclosing every park, stretching along the Moskva River. The Boulevard Ring, which forms a semi-circle on the river, has a line of trees and gardens at its center. Black iron railings enclose the Ring. In winter the black lines stand out prominently against the snow. When spring comes, old women will be out painting them. They fail to remove any of the old paint or dirt that has accumulated so that each railing has heavy-encrusted globs of black paint along its entire length.

The School of Journalism, where I lectured each week, is located in the oldest building of the university, situated on the Prospekt Marksa opposite the Alexandrovsky Gardens of the Kremlin. It was built by Matvei Kazakov in 1786 to 1793 and badly damaged by fire in 1812, after which it was restored by Ghilardi. Ghilardi constructed the handsome façade with its eight-column colonnade; perhaps it was he also who erected the high wrought-iron fence and the ornate gates enclosing it. Intrigued as I was by this iron work, I wanted a photograph of the fence or of a part of it. One day on my way to lecture, I stood within the fence and asked my wife to take a photograph of me from the outside across the railing. A Militia man standing nearby came up at once to tell her to stop.

Moscow State University

In the United States, I have long been accustomed to giant skyscraper dormitory complexes at a number of state universities,

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but the dormitory at M.G.U. (Moskovski Gosudarstvenni Universitet) was absolutely overwhelming. The structure is of the Stalinist imperial high-rise kitsch, the Georgian dictator's answer to New York. It consists of three towers; those on the sides, half the size of the middle one, are topped by a giant clock and a barometer, and the huge middle tower by the inevitable red star, resting in a laurel crescent. There is no end of crenellated alcoves, balconies, and ornamented projections, flights of steps leading up to great marble urns (empty), and ornate iron lamps resting on pillars in the midst of ornamented courtyards. The entire complex is surrounded by walls and ornate iron railings with guard boxes at every entrance. The effect of the lower ornamented towers and their accompanying balconies and balustrades is that of a rather ridiculous rococo candle-holder in which the middle tower rests like a giant candle. I had reached this conclusion before one of my students told me that this was exactly the effect that Stalin is said to have intended.

There are seven of these towering structures around Moscow (among the most obvious are the Ukraine Hotel and the Foreign Ministry), all built in the same style by the same architect and all resembling great ornamented candles. In Georgia, my student explained, when one dies, the coffin is surrounded by huge candles. When Stalin constructed these skyscraper complexes (with slave labor), he was preparing for his own death in this monumental fashion.

The main university building looked out on a long esplanade with a series of fountains (not working, of course, when we arrived), and stretching toward the Moskva River, where there was an observation tower and a giant ski jump (wreathed in red and blue hortatory slogans). I never saw anyone make this jump, which looked absolutely suicidal, especially since there seemed so little space along the river below, but I am not a skier. Sonja, who is, claimed that she did see a man jump one day. But on most days the main activity was the regular arrival of tour buses, from which Russian tourists would dismount to enjoy, gray fog permitting, the spectacular view. And then, too, there were the groups of Moscow newlyweds who came up to view the city before starting off on their new lives. Here, to the left, were the freshly gilded domes of the Novodevichy Convent and, straight ahead, the Lushniki Stadium, a great sports arena, where in the 1950s Yevtushenko and Voznesensky had read their poetry to huge crowds, and beyond it, all of Moscow.

The main entrance to the university building had a long, wide tier of steps that led up through great glass doors to a huge marble-lined hall, where a counter to the right enclosed endless lines of coat-hooks. (One must check one's coat when entering any Russian building in winter, and in order to do so you must have loops sewn in your coat. One is never permitted to carry a coat into a restaurant or theater. Here, of course, we could keep ours on since we were going to our living quarters.) The hooks in this check room, except on very special occasions, were usually empty. Visitors or students living in the dormitory rarely used this entrance; the entrance on the opposite side or back of the building, the Club Entrance (*Klubnaya Chast*), was the one generally used. Here the taxis, when there were taxis, waited, and the regular buses stopped, and the mini-buses that took one the several very long blocks to the University Metro stop.

The Club Entrance provided the easiest access to the building, but no access was really easy. Right behind every door or in the guard box at every gate stood or sat a hefty square-faced woman, checking one's pass (*propiska*). At times the women were replaced by students, and one would have thought that the students would be more lax with their fellows, but we found this not to be the case. They appeared to be equally vigilant.

The various wings of the university building are designated by letters, one by the Russian capital *B* (*beh*), one by *B* (*veh*), another by *D* (which is the same in the

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Roman as in the Cyrillic alphabet). Not all students or all visitors, even from other parts of the Soviet Union, use the Cyrillic alphabet. And so to accommodate those who use the Roman alphabet, at one particular entrance which we regularly used when returning to the building by private car, the large letters *V* and *D* were attached to the iron grill, the *V* representing the pronunciation of the Russian *B*.

The university powers in charge of lettering, lacking a knowledge of English or perhaps refusing with their puritanical bias to admit the existence of such things, failed to realize that the letters *V-D* in the United States designate the venereal disease wards of hospitals. There was indeed something of the nature of a hospital about this place in that it was closely guarded, costly to get into, and not easy to get out of once one had been admitted. Even before he had seen the *V-D*, my thirty-year-old son, who came to visit us, noted in his diary that the place reminded him of the Wassaic State Mental Hospital in Connecticut or of some gigantic reform school.

Once inside the building, one found the long marble corridors and the complicated layout indeed forbidding. During my first days there, trying to find my way through these halls and sometimes missing a sign and taking a wrong turn or the wrong tier of elevators, I had the impression of being trapped in the bowels of Grand Central Station, its endless marble corridors closing in on me, and feeling free only when I reached the Club Entrance and found a bus pulling up outside in the cold.

One day when completely lost, I stopped a young man to ask the way: he turned out to be a Cuban, who explained to me in Spanish how to get to the office I was trying to locate. The irony of a Cuban student showing an American professor the way to a government office in a Soviet university was not lost on either of us.

By Soviet standards, the dormitory at M.G.U. is considered an extremely privileged establishment. More food, fresh vegetables and fruits particularly, is available in the shops in the building than in many markets in the city. The rooms in our block, however dreary they seemed to us, were in the eyes of the Russian students who came to visit us, absolutely luxurious.

At every entrance to M.G.U., one had to present one's *propiska* with a photographic likeness. We had spent three days after our arrival presenting five photographs in as many offices, until through a slot in a wall through a sliding door, after the presentation of the proper papers, a surly face appeared and a reluctant hand reached through to give us our passes. At each section of the building another guard usually stood right beside the elevator. We were soon to discover how self-important each of these guards is and how difficult at times they can make one's life. Each floor, of course, also had its floor lady (*dezhurnaya*) whose duty it was to keep an eye on everything and everybody.

It never occurred to me to ask what the dormitory hours were. I assumed that whatever they were they did not apply to me as a professor. Usually we were back well before midnight; the theaters, concerts, and the like were out early, and there was no place to go afterwards. But some of the literary parties we attended went on into the early morning hours, and on more than one occasion we were scolded severely by the guard at the elevator of the dormitory. On one particular evening after a very successful reading with Andrei Voznesensky and Yevgeny Yevtushenko at the Mayakovsky Museum, we arrived back at the dormitory about ten minutes past one. We had had a wonderful evening; a large audience had listened for hours to my poems, and there had been a reception afterwards with people truly interested in American poetry. There had been many toasts and the whole evening had been a warm and radiant one. We were both glowing with excitement and good feeling when we arrived back in the Lenin Hills, Sonja's arms filled with roses. The guard stopped us and gave us a severe dressing down for having failed to arrive

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before one o'clock. We went up to bed feeling considerably deflated.

After another very successful evening, we arrived just at closing time but the friend who had brought us by car took us to the side of the building opposite the section where we were housed. Rather than have him circle the entire fortress, we got out with the idea, which seemed a reasonable one, of walking straight through the center of the building on what amounted to the second floor, so that we would come out as we often had right beside our elevators. The center of the building in this case consists of several broad empty corridors, each connected with the other by a series of glass doors. As we started through, we noticed a little man in a dustcoat in front of us who was closing each door just before we arrived. Sonja moved off a bit ahead of me, realizing at once what the man was doing. He was not only closing the doors in front of us but locking them right in our faces. On the first few doors the locks had not held, but if we did not reach each door in time we were sure to be locked out. Sonja called for me to come ahead. And so we raced behind the man, our feet almost against his, trying to catch each door before he had a chance to lock it. We called out to him, but although we were nearly touching him he never once turned around but went right ahead on his appointed round. Finally, he reached the last door just before we did and carefully bolted it from the outside, and then without even bothering to turn around, he disappeared down the corridor to the right. We stood there then as in a glass cage, gazing across an expanse of empty stairway at the guards by our elevators. They had seen exactly what had happened, but when we shook the door and motioned to them they stared absently back at us. We suddenly had the awful feeling of being trapped. If we started back down the long corridors through which we had come, we might well find that the locks on the catches of the doors had worked and we would be locked in, or even if we made our way somehow to the final door, that also, like the one we were facing, might well be locked from the outside. We might be trapped for the night and in these vast halls where there was absolutely nothing, not a bench, not a chair, nothing but the cold marble floor.

Realizing our situation, I shook the door again and again the guards at their roll-top desk by our elevators stared absently back.

What on earth is happening with those idiots, I wondered. One of them could so easily come across here and open up for us: it was literally only a few steps away and they recognized us and could see what had happened.

We waited a few minutes more, and nothing changed.

Then I lost all patience and shook the door vehemently while the guards stared back.

Finally, out of nowhere appeared an old crone, her hair flying in all directions, a wild look in her eye. Muttering to herself, she took from her pocket a great clutch of keys, turned one in the lock, and then turned on us and released a steady stream of venom.

I said that we were sorry to disturb her but that I was a professor . . . but I had no chance to go on, even if I had been able to find the words to explain our predicament.

"Professors!" she shouted over and over. "You call yourselves professors," she sneered, "you are nothing but hooligans."

"Hooligans!" she shouted, still fuming as we made our way over to our side of the building and past the empty blank faces of the guards by our elevators.

We reviewed the scene the next day with Russian friends. The little man locking the doors, they explained, was enjoying the triumph of his life. It was his job to lock the doors at one o'clock. We had arrived after one, even if only a minute or two. He was simply doing his job, and if we were stuck there, so much the worse for us. As for the old woman, the entire episode was the complete justification for her existence. Being a tyrant for those few minutes made up for all the frustrations of her dreary daily life.

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Poems *by Ronald Wallace, Robert Phillips & Charles Edward Eaton*

Albert's osprey

Albert is telling his story about the osprey
that, when two other ospreys dismantled his nest,
removing it stick by stick to a mangrove tree,
stayed atop the platform for the rest
of the mating season, going through the motions
of feeding a family, every day catching
a flounder or a skate and patiently thrashing
it back and forth, an elaborate production

for him and Nan to watch. Now Nan is gone.
But every morning they still take their walks
out past their garden plot, their mangrove swamp,
their orchid house, their egrets and their wood storks,
until the sun's too high and they must home.
And Albert's osprey guards his post, alone.

—Ronald Wallace

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Things

for Diane Wakoski

No ideas but in things,
said Doc Williams.
Christ! I must have
an awful lot of ideas.
God knows I have
an awful lot of things.
I never have enjoyed
the luxury of living
with nothing, even
next-to-nothing.
I never learned
the lesson of seeing
"isolate in the beauty
of separateness"
each thing by itself.
Unto itself, itself itself.

> *Jay Gatsby, opening the bureau*
> *to display all his shirts . . .*

I was planted in a crib
of things—ducks, dolls,
rattlers of the non-poisonous
variety. Growing up, I collected:
Dixie Cup lids, baseball cards,
matchbox cars. Live things, too:
My gerbils begat unto the umpteenth
generation. College years, things
worsened. I hated library books,
still do. Worth reading,
worth owning, my motto. Bookshelves
groaned. Paper napkins? Loathe them.
Linen closets groaned. Thoreau
would groan had he seen the van
big as the *Mayflower* (and so named)
lumbering toward Westchester
with all my unworldly possessions.

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One hundred ninety cartons
of books alone. No, not alone,
together.

The Collier Brothers, leaving
a houseful of newspapers . . .

At night I prowl the rooms
of my house, glass in hand,
to survey my things. "I'll weed
the library," I say. "Throw away
two hundred record albums"—
how low-fidelity most sound.
And just yesterday
they were the very thing.
Christ! I need things to keep
all my things in. And this year,
things got worse. I inherited
(of all things) Great Aunt Eva's
amber collection. Every surface
gleams—glass amber grapes,
amber apples, amber ashtrays
shaped like gentleman's top hats.
I've had to hire a housekeeper
just to dust the damned things.

McCullers said, "First learn
to love a tree, a rock, a cloud . . ."

I do, I do, I do. I love shoe
trees, rock records, Rolls-Royce
Silver Clouds. Lord, help me
abandon these screens I stand
behind. Help to come to believe,
No things but in ideas.

—Robert Phillips

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The naked truth

In the twilight filled with late, late roses,
Camellias, sasanqua, not yet taken by the frost,
I wonder what order, and disorder, the coming night imposes.

All afternoon on the sunporch I sat naked in the sun,
Thinking of things composed, imposed, myself a kind
of flower,
Late, late, but not yet overblown, irremediably done.

The night, of course, will have a place for me:
Order, disorder—the huge, hybrid, cosmic plan—
I remember the shining youth standing by a brilliant sea,

Also naked, feeling like some growth, some product
of the water—
Ah, that blue, blue garden of long ago,
Promising to be fertile for all my dreams no matter,

No matter what. Now this formal matrix and the mellow
tan:
I could drown heavily, if I want to, in accumulated
dreams
Without much more accomplished, perhaps, than that a boy
became a man.

The night is so full. So fulsome?—How should one behave?—
I sit among flowers, naked, summon the glamorous early sea,
And lift one gilded arm above that blue, that dark,
oncoming wave.

—*Charles Edward Eaton*

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Theater

Pastiche & parody

by Mark Steyn

Back in the days when we still had variety shows on TV, there came a moment in every impressionist's act when he'd explain that singers have always wanted to be actors and actors have always wanted to be singers, and then he'd do Jimmy Cagney singing "The Impossible Dream." That's how much of the last month's theater feels: so many people seem to be doing exactly the opposite of what they're supposed to do. Take A. R. Gurney. Once upon a time, he was a discreet chronicler of tight-lipped, tight-assed, Waspy New England society. Then, under the guise of *A Cheever Evening* (1994), he slyly offered us his version of a small Sondheim revue; next, in *Sylvia* (1995), he gave us a dog who sings "Ev'ry Time We Say Goodbye"; now, in *Overtime*, he's gone completely overboard. In his latest play, at the Manhattan Theatre Club, A. R. Gurney is doing *schtick*: as one character says, "Time will tell—or maybe *Newsweek*."

The character is Shylock, for *Overtime* is a sorta pseudo-sequel to *The Merchant of Venice*, starting with the final scene of the comedy, as Shakespeare ties up the loose ends, and then moving the dramatis personae to a garden in our own time and our own country, where Gurney proceeds to unravel them. The criticism of his Waspiness must have stung the guy more than we thought: with this play, he's redressing the balance with the multicultural fervor of the soppier Coke commercials. Portia is (or so she describes herself) a shallow party-giving Wasp, but Bassanio is Boston Irish, Gratiano is black, Jessica is a Jewish princess, Antonio is gay, Nerissa is Hispanic, Salerio is, with stale topicality, a Serb (born Salerovic) . . . Perhaps the most revealing character is Antonio, a self-loathing Wasp. "I want to be Jewish," he declares. "That's why I asked for the complete works of Wendy Wasserstein."

Actually, Gurney seems to have wound up with Wendy's off-cuts. "Do you know any Swiss?" asks Portia. "Just a family named Robinson," says Shylock. "They changed it from Rubinstein." This isn't so much Wasserstein as Wassermatter? *Overtime* comes out as one part end-of-term romp, one part English panto, one part American sitcom. And, as Gurney has hitherto never been inclined toward any of those forms, one assumes there has to be something else going on. Low comedy is a noble calling but only if it's lightly worn, and Gurney's drops like a stone: "Where would the world be without women like you?" Shylock tells Portia. "Homer's Penelope . . . Eleanor of Aquitaine . . . Kitty Carlisle Hart . . ." Perhaps the clunkiness of the jokes is the whole point: after all, Shakespeare's jokes are shoehorned in pretty clunkily, with plenty of labored nudging and winking, and, in this respect at least, *Overtime* is in the same tradition as its predecessor. Or maybe Gurney is mocking our culture's inexhaustible appetite for slick, brittle, ersatz-Yiddisher one-liners—a dys-

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functional society's preferred form of non-communication. Or maybe he just can't do jokes.

But, after much thought (and certainly more than my listless fellow theatergoers were prepared to give it), I'm forced to conclude that Gurney means it, that this is his big statement about America on the eve of the millennium. At the close of *The Merchant of Venice*, plot and characters are tidied up, everything is ordered and settled. In the course of this updated class reunion, Shakespeare's ending proves to be illusory, merely a temporary staging post: Portia discovers that Bassanio loves only himself, Antonio bursts from the closet and makes a pass at Bassanio, etc. There are gags about Jews and Episcopalians, and blacks and Hispanics, and women and gays: unlike the Venetians, it seems, America has only a majority made up of minorities, in which we are all outsiders, all Shylocks. Is Lorenzo sure he isn't gay? "As sure as anyone can be in these ambiguous times," he says.

Initially, you're taken aback by the graceful Gurney's descent into a coarse and clumsy vernacular that sits so awkwardly next to Greatest Hits quotes from the Bard ("Know what I like about this babe?" shrugs Bassanio, just before Portia does the "quality of mercy" line). Then, you figure that the play must be his own quirky protest against political correctness. Recent precedents for multicultural societies, from Habsburg Vienna to Pierre Trudeau's Canada, are not exactly encouraging, and, for a playwright who has been content for most of his life to explore a homogenous, insulated subgroup, it could have been a rewarding theme. But he winds up with a string of contrived resolutions that seem slavishly to follow PC orthodoxy and to commend all the usual generalities—"diversity," "inclusiveness," "tolerance." In earlier, generation-spanning plays like *The Dining Room* and *Scenes from American Life*, Gurney seemed to have no trouble starting with a small situation and saying something big. Here, he's tried to start big and wound up saying nothing at all. The best thing about the play is Nicholas Martin's staging: Manhattan Theatre Club seems to have written the thing off as an obligatory payback to Gurney for the success of his last play *Sylvia*, which made a commercial transfer and has since been sold to the West End.

Throughout the evening, I found myself recalling an observation of Alan Jay Lerner bemoaning the demographical obsessions of the electronic media and the music business: "You can imagine what kind of theater we'd have today if they'd said to Shakespeare, 'Hey, man, you gotta write for the kids.' " *Overtime* has a few quaintly affecting moments of collegiate facetiousness, a reminder of the days when the jokes at the Hasty Pudding Club or the Oxford Footlights took for granted a shared familiarity with the beacons of English literature. In an age when you can graduate in Eng. lit. without ever having studied anything resembling Eng. lit., such assumptions are no longer possible: what we make jokes about is often the surest indicator of the health of the culture. I should imagine, for example, that today most American college theatricals spoof little Shakespeare and a lot more Quentin Tarantino. Now *Forbidden Hollywood* (at the Triad) has joined them. Gerard Alessandrini, the creator and writer of *Forbidden Broadway*, spent most of the 1980s affectionately mocking the'tah from the Royal Shakespeare Company to Madonna's appearance in a David Mamet play. But, even then, you were aware that there were no longer enough recognizable stage targets to sustain this sort of enterprise; besides, for all the jibes at Andrew Lloyd Webber, much of the evening was given up to fond parodies of stars dead (Ethel Merman) or retired (Mary Martin). Now, with his theatrical well run dry, Alessandrini has been forced by default to turn his attention to Hollywood.

That in itself is a fine image of the enfeebled state of legit, especially as he can barely conceal his contempt for motion pictures. But Alessandrini compounds it in the evening's key sketch. In dark suits and silly

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wigs, Lance Roberts and Michael McGrath strut out supercooler-than-cool as Samuel L. Jackson and John Travolta in Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction*. They then proceed to sing, to the tune of "Make 'Em Laugh," "Make 'em gag, make 'em gag," about violence in the movies.

This scene is a much better emblem of America on the brink of the twenty-first century than anything in *Overtime*. It cruelly exposes how doomed Alessandrini's attempt to reach out beyond his audience of hardcore Broadway buffs is. More than that, it so thoroughly confirms the impotence of theater in the face of hucksters like Tarantino. It's not that that inoffensive little song from *Singin' in the Rain* is an ineffectual weapon against a director and his admirers who seem to have no memory of any cultural reference before 1973; rather, the song is precisely the wrong reaction to Tarantino: he does not make us gag. If anything, the satire would have been sharper with the original lyric: Tarantino violence makes us laugh. In *Pulp Fiction*, when Travolta accidentally blows some guy's head off in his car and blood and tissue explode all over the upholstery, the audience reacts with delight. Tarantino is truly the ultimate postmodern pop artist. His predecessors insisted that they were out to shock us; Tarantino makes no pretense at shocking us: he acknowledges that we enjoy it. I described him in Hollywood recently as the Mantovani of testosterone: he takes things that are raw and real, and makes bland, easy listening arrangements out of them. That's the trouble with electronic culture: it's passive culture. It desensitizes us to the point where nothing stirs any kind of honest, emotional reaction. For that reason, television's new miracle cure, the V-chip, is useless, because it's not the message (the shows) but the medium (the set) that's the problem. "Make 'em gag, make 'em gag" is wrong, because it's a theatrical reaction to Tarantino, not a dull-eyed electronic one.

Electronic culture is a threat to not just live theater (that battle's probably been lost) but also live life. You can't but be struck these days by how, in small but telling ways, electronic reality is supplanting real reality. At many of America's airports, for example, the two best stools at the bar have been given to a pair of animatronic figures loosely modelled on characters from the sitcom *Cheers*: as you wait for your plane, they burble on with inane, boring bozo barroom banter. They seem more real to us than real barflies because they're like the barflies we've seen on TV. This is a chilling vision of the future: a society that can't even be bothered to be its own maudlin drunks is surely doomed. But then you get on the plane, and you notice that the emergency procedures are now left to a special "safety video": an actress pretending to be a stewardess demonstrates how to fit the life jacket to an actor pretending to be a passenger. Even though the real stewardess is standing only a few feet from us, reality seems more real when coming from a TV screen. (I'd like to give a cheer to Virgin Atlantic Airways, who recently scrapped these pathetic videos and returned to a traditionally choreographed routine by the cabin crew; live theater—you can't beat it!)

You don't have to be *too* pessimistic to wonder what things will be like as the new century dawns. So I'm glad to see a modest resurgence in the kind of futuristic drama we used to see on Broadway seventy years ago. Indeed, the only problem with Richard Dresser's *Below the Belt* (at the John Houseman Theatre) is that it could have been written seventy years ago. We are in "a distant land" somewhere across a vast desert in an industrial complex that makes 20,911 units per day of something never specified. The theme is, obviously, dehumanization, the repression of individuality, etc.—as potent a theme as it ever was, if not exactly for the same reasons it once was. Nothing dates quicker than yesterday's futuristic vision—or, as the old song goes, "My Future Just Passed." Thus, in the Twenties, dramatists assumed that in the future the masses would live in subterranean dormitories and pass their days in thrall to vast industrial

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machines of clanking gears and levers; as things turned out, we should be so lucky. In the Nineties, it seems far more likely the masses will wind up enslaved by leisure, vegged out on the couch, pausing only to order up pizza by e-mail or engage in virtual-reality sex with the fax machine: I have seen the future, and it's jerks. There's something almost nostalgic, at a time when the word "corporate" is always followed by "downsizing," about Dresser's vision of an impersonal, industrial bureaucratic system which rules its employees' lives.

We are in the company of three men, all "checkers." There is Merkin (Jude Ciccolella), head of the checking department, and two junior checkers, Hanrahan (Judd Hirsch) and Dobbitt (Robert Sean Leonard). They are not so much characters as empty shells, dulled by a world in which language has been so degraded in meaning that they are unable to communicate even with each other, never mind the regional director down the line at the home office, or the workers at the compound whose productivity they check.

I liked the idea of "checkers." "Any man can work," Merkin says at one point. "It takes an extraordinary man to check work." I assumed it was a comment on our strange world where, whenever a subscription service calls up to sell you a magazine or a phone company to persuade you to change your long-distance arrangements, there's always a follow-up the next day from somebody whose job it is to check that you were satisfied with the way the first fellow did his job. Eventually, in a system built on checks and balances, we will all be checking up on someone else. But it turns out that Dresser is thinking of more traditional forms of checking. "I never knew how lonely it would be when I chose to become a checker," sighs Dobbitt, peering wistfully through the window at a party to which they have not been invited. The party is for Economic Recovery and Realignment Day, at which mention you realize that this world does not exist in relation to our world at all, but only in relation to other fictional worlds from other socially conscious predictive dramas.

In one sense, though, he's bang up to date: human presence is no longer necessary. Hanrahan loves his wife's letters and Dobbitt misses the *idea* of his wife, but neither has any need of his wife per se; Merkin's wife died and he got compassionate leave, but, by the time he got back home, she'd "come back" and dead people are never the same.

Well, you get the idea: the system is faceless, it breaks the spirit. The best moment comes when Hanrahan recalls how once, long ago, he danced at a company party. He was a good dancer, but he offended his colleagues by being different. Now, years later, in a gesture of individuality, he asks Dobbitt to dance with him. It is a modest, touching scene, but most of your sympathies go not to the character—the cipher—but to Judd Hirsch. He's a big, beefy, burly guy, full of humanity, and the writing here has no call for his talents. I'm pretty sure, as with A. R. Gurney, that the dialogue is *intended* to be bad: "You don't choose checking, checking chooses you" and so forth. Clichés are all that's left; language is divorced from meaning; social isolation is inevitable. But Dresser is not a good enough playwright to enable inarticulate people to reveal themselves to us. And, by the end, the play is just plain silly: some weird industrial mutation, tiny creatures whose eyes glow in the dark or (alternatively) superglow-worms who travel in pairs, rise up and take over the planet. And, by this stage in the evening, you're cheering them on.

Strange how we take stock of our age and look to the future by looking back to the past: Gurney turns back to Shakespeare, Dresser to Fritz Lang. *Floyd Collins* at Playwrights' Horizons offers its own take on contemporary America, using an event from the past which resonates precisely and distinctly today. Given the long gestation period required for new musicals, I don't suppose Tina Landau and Adam Guettel

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had O.J. in mind when they wrote it, but these days any story involving a "media circus"—that's to say, large numbers of competitive, unscrupulous reporters, rubbernecking sightseers, and relatives with stories to sell—has automatic echoes. In 1925, Floyd Collins became famous for exploring a cave and getting stuck 150 feet underground. Folks who entered the cave could get near enough to hear him praying and begging. Sixteen days later, when they finally broke through to him, he was dead.

This is terrific material for a musical. What's going on inside Collins's head? There are your soliloquies! What's going on up at ground level? There are your broader, company numbers! If you want to contrast the horrors below with the horrors above, you can even use counterpoint. Tina Landau, director-librettist, and Adam Guettel, composer-lyricist, don't wring quite as much out of the story as they should, but, as a consideration of an American obsession, of private tragedy as public entertainment, they're certainly on to something.

The music has a clean logic to it: pure and folklike at first; rinky-dink Tin Pan Alley novelties when the circus shows up; and dissonant, long-lined, semi-operatic as the dark engulfs Floyd Collins. The problem, I think, is that, as a kind of ballad folk opera, it's too clean, too pure. Guettel is the son of Mary Rodgers, composer of *Once upon a Mattress*, and grandson of Richard Rodgers, composer of pretty well everything. Gran'pa could have taught him a thing or two about the use of folk materials in drama. I'll cite just the most obvious example:

> Oh, what a beautiful mornin'
> Oh, what a beautiful day . . .

It seems as simple as a folk-song, but no anonymous, demotic farmhands' sing-a-long would have Curly sing "*mor*-nin'" on D natural and then, in the equivalent spot two lines on, "*fee*-lin'" on D sharp. You need a professional composer for that: they signal Curly's intensity of feeling about the land he belongs to. This is more than mere pastiche can ever achieve: Rodgers and Hammerstein have taken a folk form and imbued it with deep, rare passion. Guettel, on the other hand, uses a folk form because, well, that's what you would have heard in Kentucky in 1925. Unlike Rodgers and Hammerstein letting Jud Fry fester in his sexual obsession in *Oklahoma!*, Guettel and Landau clean up and prettify Collins, making him a naïve, folky innocent. It's a tale worth telling, but they have fitted him to their preconceived notions. And, in dignifying and ennobling him, they have, as much as the "system" in *Below the Belt*, dehumanized him. The result is a crass paradox: a story about a guy 150 feet underground that lacks depth.

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Art

Pus & politics: Kienholz at the Whitney

by Mario Naves

Is it possible to write about an exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art without commenting on the institution itself? If lamenting the dismal state of affairs at the Whitney has become tiresome, it is no less so than that which the museum routinely proffers as art. What is surprising, then, about "Kienholz: A Retrospective" is not that it almost didn't happen, but that it didn't happen sooner.[1] Although he had been working for over forty years, Edward Kienholz—who died in 1994 at the age of sixty-six—could be considered the quintessential artist for the Whitney of the 1990s, a museum partial to (as a colleague has it) "the school of puke, pus, piss, and politics." This is an unfortunate turn of phrase but one that sums up the Whitney's criteria for art all too well. It sums up "Kienholz: A Retrospective" pretty well too.

The title of the exhibition refers not only to Edward Kienholz but also to his wife, Nancy Reddin Kienholz. In 1981 Kienholz retroactively designated his wife as co-creator of all work made since 1972, the year they met, and this collaboration was to last until his death. While this acknowledgement by Kienholz may have been, in part, a display of feminist solidarity, the extent to which Nancy Reddin Kienholz was an equal in their artistic partnership is uncertain. The Kienholzian vision is, after all, of a piece throughout the period covered by the exhibition (1954–1994) with no substantive variation in the post-1972 work. Perhaps it's best to assume that great minds think alike and leave it at that.

"Kienholz: A Retrospective" includes over a hundred pieces, occupying two floors of the museum. Kienholz's work may be three-dimensional, but it isn't, technically speaking, sculpture, and only his earliest wall pieces can be considered assemblage without qualification. Best known for his tableaux—elaborate and dingy environments populated by thrift shop curios and grotesque figures—Kienholz's work is really a form of theater. The scenes he creates are dank ruminations on death, decay, institutionalization, sexism, racism, war, imperialism, abortion, Vietnam, National Socialism, and American culture. The tableaux are constructed of plaster casts, stuffed animals, neon lights, live birds and fish, used furniture, chopped and battered dolls, human hair, automobiles, pianos, and innumerous other objects all overlaid with a splattering of brown, viscous liquid. Dada and Surrealism influenced Kienholz's tableaux but

1 "Kienholz: A Retrospective" opened at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, on February 29, 1996, and will remain on view through June 2. The show will travel to the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (June 30–November 3, 1996), and the Berlinische Galerie, Berlin (February 14–April 20, 1997). A catalogue of the exhibition, by Walter Hopps, has been published by the Whitney Museum and D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers (300 pages, $85; $40 paper).

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not, one feels, as forcefully as the sleazier attractions at roadside carnies. A few years ago, I had occasion to describe an exhibition as a "postmodernist fun house that is no fun at all." If I had any gift for prognostication I would've saved such a line for "Kienholz: A Retrospective."

The Beanery (1965) is one of Kienholz's most famous and representative works. It is a freestanding construction of a dilapidated barroom (based on an actual Hollywood bar and grill), crowded with hunched figures whose facial features have been replaced by clocks. Only one museum visitor is allowed inside *The Beanery* at a time, perhaps in deference to conservation concerns. But such isolation forces the gallery-goer into a complicit voyeurism, not the healthiest way to engage with art. Admittedly, Kienholz had a faculty for picking out pertinent details—*The Beanery* does evoke the cracked-vinyl ambience common to many diners—that reveal the artist's acute powers of observation. But the work's gross portentousness is so relentlessly over the top that it becomes silly and, finally, stupid. And Kienholz's vaunted sense of humor is so devoid of humanity that it ceases to resemble humor at all. For instance, one of the "satiric" song titles found on the jukebox inside *The Beanery* is "Come to Me My Mellon-bellied Baby" by a group called the Abortionists. W. C. Fields proved that misanthropy could be cogent and funny. Kienholz, however, just lets us know how miserable he thinks the world is, and that's supposed to pass as profundity. It doesn't.

It says quite a bit about the foibles of the art world, however, that Kienholz's nihilism *is* mistaken for profundity. This is how the Whitney gets away with calling his work "intense realism." And this is why catalogue essayist Thomas McEvilley ponders Kienholz's "nostalgia for a pre-capitalist civilization and a desire for a post-capitalist resolution" in such highfalutin terms. One matronly woman at the exhibition proclaimed that the tableaux "freeze history we don't like to see." This observation probably would have pleased Kienholz but it is a charitable one. The Kienholzes aren't capable of plumbing the intricacies of history or human emotion, except in the basest of terms. And when they attempt the elegiac—as in *Mother with Child with Child* (1976) or Kienholz's *The Illegal Operation* (1962)—the work is simply vulgar. "Ed and I . . . are moralists," Nancy Reddin Kienholz proclaimed in a recent issue of *The Village Voice*. This is true only if one considers sensationalistic schlock a reliable transmitter of wisdom.

Kienholz's tableaux are intended to offend and rattle viewers out of their "patina of couth," to borrow Marcus Raskin's clumsy phrase from his catalogue essay. But how shocking are they really? Certainly, there is much here that is distasteful. The Kienholzes' diorama on the hypocrisies of organized religion, *All Have Sinned in Rm. 323* (1992), has stayed with me, if for all the wrong reasons. Yet on the day I visited the museum, gallery-goers reacted to the scenarios on exhibit not with disgust (or a sense of revelation) but with a detached bemusement; at times, they nodded sagaciously. Of course, anyone who regularly traverses the galleries of New York is bound to be inured to this kind of thing, but I suspect that the only people this work would truly offend are those who wouldn't think about seeing it in the first place. Are we to assume, as the Whitney often does, that preaching to the converted constitutes outreach? The Kienholzes offend only in the sense that they play to an audience cynical enough to play along with them.

The fate of "provocative" art like that of the Kienholzes' is that it is (contrary to its supporters' claims) readily digested, easy to "get." This is what we have learned from the career of Marcel Duchamp. For that matter, it's also what we learn from Richard Jackson, Kienholz's hunting partner, who comments that "it doesn't take a Ph.D. to understand [his art]." One is tempted to counter that it hardly takes anything at all. This is especially true for the politics of the work. Walter Hopps, the organizer of the

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exhibition and Kienholz's friend for almost forty years, states that the artist "wasn't in any sense left-wing, and he was totally skeptical of any political party." Kienholz's skepticism is a given, but his politics have all the convolution of a bumper sticker slogan, being nothing more than received liberal pieties coarsened by the artist's meat-grinder *Weltanschauung*. Kienholz's political sense is so simple-minded that both sides of the political spectrum are likely to be annoyed by it. If there was ever proof needed that political art cheapens not only art but political discourse, well, here it is.

Is there anything to recommend about the work? There are moments when Kienholz's juxtapositions of found objects intimate a nostalgia that has some teeth to it. In *Portrait of a Mother with Past Affixed Also* (1980–81), a framed photo of an elderly woman's face is placed where the head should be on a life-size cast of a figure. The friction between the flatness of the photo and the three-dimensionality of the body generates real creepiness. It may be corny, but it works; it's certainly more effective than the piece as a whole.

Of course, the friction in *Portrait* is generated through formal, rather than thematic, means, a trait largely absent from the rest of Kienholz's tableaux. One of the few pieces that does function as sculpture is *The Gossip* (1962), a cabinet divided by knotted canvas tubing and book-ended by two masks. *The Gossip* is Dadaist assemblage of a rather conventional sort, but it's also absurd and grotesque in just the right measures. Here Kienholz's smart-ass guile fits the subject. One can accurately gauge the depth of Kienholz the social critic by noting that he made better art about idle chatter than he ever did about the military-industrial complex.

Exiting the exhibition, I walked in to "Joseph Cornell: Cosmic Travels"[2] in the museum's lobby gallery. After the Kienholz debacle, this small show—consisting of a handful of Cornell's assemblages from the Whitney's permanent collection—came as a respite. Its atrocious installation aside, "Cosmic Travels" was a reminder that art need not be ugly or assaultive, that it could be beautiful and possessed of magic. "Cosmic Travels" was mounted, I would guess, as a means of establishing an art historical precedent for Kienholz's tableaux. I suppose that it does. But this is a lousy burden to foist upon poor old Cornell and one that he does not deserve. Cornell's fragile meditations on distance and memory show up Kienholz's work for the thuggery that it is.

While Cornell's assemblages do survive the museum's acrimony, how much longer can the Whitney get away with insulting its public with exhibitions like "Kienholz: A Retrospective"? In the introduction to the catalogue, David A. Ross, the Alice Pratt Brown Director at the museum, writes that the support received from the National Endowment for the Arts for the Kienholz exhibition "may be one of the last grants of its kind to the Whitney." Many people are concerned about the Republican Congress's plans for the NEA, as well as the effect such plans may have on the arts in the United States. They have reason to be concerned. But I worry more about cultural institutions that disguise their contempt for art under the rubric of social justice. To assert that the Whitney Museum of American Art has done much to debase the cultural life of our time is not hyperbole. It is a fact, one far more disturbing than anything to be seen in "Kienholz: A Retrospective."

2 "Joseph Cornell: Cosmic Travels" opened at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, on December 14, 1995, and closed on March 10, 1996.

Exhibition notes

"The Grosvenor Gallery: A Palace of Art in Victorian England" at the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven. March 2–April 28, 1996

This nearly exemplary exhibition brings together some seventy pictures and a good deal of period memorabilia to present a

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snapshot of the mildly infamous Grosvenor Gallery in London, which from 1877 to 1890 was the chief artistic and social venue for second-generation pre-Raphaelites (Burne-Jones, Alma-Tadema, et al.), those associated with the Aesthetic Movement (Whistler and his followers), and sundry other important artists including George Frederic Watts (whom Henry James called "the first portrait painter in England") and James Joseph Tissot.

The Grosvenor Gallery, located in New Bond Street in the heart of London's gallery district, was the brainchild of Sir Coutts Lindsay—according to Whistler, "the handsomest man in London"—and his wife, Lady Blanche Lindsay, an aristocratic couple of advanced tastes and sporadic artistic ambition. Both Lindsays were amateur painters, and both exhibited occasionally at the Grosvenor Gallery. But Henry James was right to insist, in his review of the gallery's inaugural exhibition in 1877, that their creation of the gallery was not a vanity operation, existing to provide them with "a place to exhibit [their] own productions." The aesthetic achievement of the artists associated with the Grosvenor Gallery—and the organizers of the exhibition, Susan P. Casteras and Colleen Denney, have assembled good examples from most of its stars—was rarely (if ever) of the first rank. But in providing a lively and welcoming alternative to the Royal Academy—the *raison d'être* of the gallery—the Lindsays performed a valuable service not only to the artists they nurtured but to the life of London artistic culture generally.

As the organizers of this exhibition stress, the Lindsays sought to provide an alternative to the Royal Academy in more ways than one. Not only did they exhibit the period's more innovative artists—or, as in the case of Watts, more innovative work by artists whose less daring efforts were welcome at the Royal Academy—they also pioneered new exhibition techniques. For example, they eschewed the crowded, floor-to-ceiling montage preferred at the Academy in favor of a more commodious arrangement in which an artist's works would be grouped together with generous spacing between each picture. Alas, Sir Coutts was forward-looking in other ways as well: the Grosvenor Gallery was, as a press release for this exhibition notes, "the first commercial gallery in London to have an elegant restaurant on its premises" along with many other "amenities." No doubt it seemed like a good idea at the time.

The Grosvenor's inaugural exhibition attracted wide notice. The young Oscar Wilde as well as Henry James weighed in with enthusiastic notices. (The exhibition did not, however, spark Wilde's critical acumen: "there are," he wrote about Watts's rather ghastly *Love and Death*, "perhaps few paintings to compare with this in intensity and marvel of conception.") But the Grosvenor's greatest stroke of good fortune came with John Ruskin's declaration that Whistler's *Nocturne in Black and Gold: Falling Rocket* amounted to "flinging a pot of paint in the public's face." This led the infuriated Whistler to instigate the notorious libel suit against Ruskin that provided Londoners with so much entertainment at the time. (Whistler won the suit, but the victory was pyrrhic: the court awarded him only a shilling in damages, and so the legal fees bankrupted him.)

The notoriety generated by this suit gave the gallery a terrific boost right at the beginning, and its denizens were soon providing grist for the satiric mills of *Punch* magazine, which regularly lampooned the gallery. (A generous selection of these sallies is on view in the exhibition.) Grosvenor and its habitués even attracted the comedic gaze of Gilbert and Sullivan, who referred to the "greenery-yallery-Grosvenor-gallery-foot-in-the-grave-young-men" in *Patience*, their send-up of Oscar Wilde and the Aesthetic Movement. Lady Lindsay was a full partner—financial and in other ways—of the Grosvenor Gallery, but Sir Coutts managed to keep the gallery open after they separated in 1882. Additional financial reverses, however, forced him to close the gallery in 1890, after a run of fourteen years.

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The organizers of this show write that they aimed "not to replicate specific rooms or exhibitions so much as to distill and evoke the gallery's main achievements and key exhibition reforms in terms of major works of art, contributors, and issues." In this they have succeeded admirably, and if this revisting of the Grosvenor Gallery is only *nearly* exemplary it is chiefly because of the occasional intrusion of feminist politics. Thus we are treated to a small amount of PC language ("spokespersons" etc.) and are assured that a section of the exhibition devoted to women artists bears witness to "a continuing concern with gender construction." In the end, though, these are minor distractions from what is a modest but eminently informative exhibition about a neglected sliver of Victorian cultural history.

A catalogue of the exhibition, edited by Susan P. Casteras and Colleen Denney, has been published by the Yale University Press (209 pages, $34.95).

—*Roger Kimball*

"The Art of Thomas Wilmer Dewing: Beauty Reconfigured" at the Brooklyn Museum. March 22–June 9, 1996

Thomas Wilmer Dewing (1851–1938) may be the last important nineteenth-century American painter to receive proper recognition in the twentieth. Although Dewing died less than half a century ago, his once commanding reputation had predeceased the man himself by a couple of decades. He has had his isolated admirers since then, to be sure, but by and large even the public that has taken a keen interest in the minor contemporaries of Whistler, Sargent, and Eakins has scarcely been aware of Dewing's work. As recently as the 1960s, some of our museums were even selling Dewing paintings out of their own collections.

The long period during which the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington was closed for repairs was yet another obstacle to anything like a Dewing revival, for it is only at the Freer that Dewing can be seen at full strength. When the Freer Gallery reopened in the spring of 1993, the museum's Dewing room proved to be a sensation to a new generation of museumgoers that hardly knew the artist's name.

The exhibition that Susan A. Hobbs and Barbara Dayer Gallati have now organized at the Brooklyn Museum under the title, "The Art of Thomas Wilmer Dewing: Beauty Reconfigured," seems, however, to be the first museum retrospective to be devoted to the artist in this century. It cannot be a complete retrospective, of course, without the Freer paintings, and the Freer does not lend. But this is a splendid exhibition, all the same, and it affords an excellent introduction to Dewing's art.

Dewing had certain affinities with Whistler, even to the extent of giving certain figure paintings titles such as *Harmony in Rose and Gray* and *Orange and Rose*, and he was also strongly drawn to the element of enigmatic anecdote in Vermeer—perhaps the only American painter of his time to have such a strong interest in Vermeer. Yet in his paintings Dewing is finally quite unlike Whistler—he is less of a realist than Whistler, for one thing. (He has a more delicate, silkier touch, too; the surface of a Dewing painting has a kind of luminous sheen that Whistler could never equal.) Dewing doesn't much resemble Vermeer, either, for the anecdotal element in Dewing is fairly innocuous. Nor is it quite enough to say of Dewing—as almost everyone writing about Dewing does—that he was a votary of the Aesthetic Movement. A devoted aesthete Dewing surely was, but the particular spirit of aestheticism that he brought to his best paintings—*The White Birch* (1896–99), say, or *The Hermit Thrush* (1893)—tends so radically to dematerialize the subject matter of his art that its subjects all but disappear into a pure chromatic mist.

The paradox in Dewing's art is that his adored principal subject was the clothed female figure, yet the aesthetic imperative that governs these paintings of women gives priority to the pictorial space, whether landscape or interior, which the female

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figures occupy. In *The White Birch*, for example, the two female figures are almost lost to the eye—lost in the brilliant green haze that dominates the picture's surface with a power that is more abstract than representational. *The Hermit Thrush* goes pretty far in that direction, too—in the direction of a virtually abstract light-filled landscape space devoid of topographical articulation or human drama.

Elsewhere in Dewing's oeuvre, it is sometimes a hinted-at human drama that seems to be the point of departure for a painting, yet in the execution of the picture the anecdote is quickly stripped of interest in favor of the painterly execution. This aesthetic bias, as it may be called, is felt even in a good many of Dewing's portraits of women, which, with rare exceptions—the *Portrait of Frances Houston* (c. 1880) is one of them—show remarkably little interest in the subjects' character. Women in Dewing's pictures tend to be painted as aesthetic objects—*not* sex objects, as we now use that term, but aesthetic objects, which is something else (though in life Dewing seems to have had quite a healthy interest in the opposite sex).

This subordination of the female figure to a more general aesthetic imperative in Dewing's painting has inevitably become a source of feminist complaint in recent years, and it is doubtless for this reason that in the book-length catalogue that accompanies the current exhibition there is such a determined effort to discover "elements of discontent" and "almost imperceptible tensions" in Dewing's paintings—even, alas, "images [that] suggest the discords of his age." For myself, attempting to turn Dewing into a kind of Existentialist of 1890s Aestheticism looks like a foolhardy pursuit. Dewing was a painter of aesthetic fantasy, and as he went to a great deal of artistic labor to keep even a hint of "the discords of his age" from ever appearing in his pictures, I think it wrong for scholars to attempt to put into his art what he so definitively left out.

Be all that as it may, "The Art of Thomas Wilmer Dewing" is a welcome event. What it "reconfigures," however, isn't so much the idea of beauty as it is the aesthetic history of late nineteenth-century American painting.

Following its installation at the Brooklyn Museum, the exhibition will travel to the National Museum of American Art in Washington (July 19–October 24, 1996) and the Detroit Institute of Arts (November 9, 1996–January 19, 1997). A catalogue of the exhibition, with essays by Susan A. Hobbs and Barbara Dayer Gallati, has been published by the Brooklyn Museum in association with the Smithsonian Institution Press (224 pages, $65; $29.95 paper).

—*Hilton Kramer*

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Music

A foursquare waltz: "Der Rosenkavalier" at City Opera

by John Simon

"Louder, louder!" Richard Strauss is supposed to have exhorted his orchestra players according to the best-known anecdote about him, "I can still hear the singers." If this famous story is not apocryphal, and not a joke the distinguished composer-conductor was perpetrating (he was actually a fine and elegant conductor), he would have been pleased with the New York City Opera production of *Der Rosenkavalier*: one did not hear the singers very much. And if one did hear them, their diction wasn't much good. And if one could actually make out the words, the German—or Austrian—wasn't any good. To be sure, there were the surtitles, but even they, perhaps taking their cue from the stage action, were pallid and hard to read.

Der Rosenkavalier (1911) is one of the summit achievements of twentieth-century opera, probably the happiest collaboration between Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannsthal, the most accomplished composer-librettist team in operatic history, since neither Da Ponte nor Boito was Hofmannsthal's equal as poet-playwright. *Rosenkavalier*, unlike their previous *Elektra* and Strauss's earlier *Salome*, was to be a Mozartian opera along the lines of *The Marriage of Figaro*. What made these artists so effective a duo was not, however, their similarity, but their difference. Hofmannsthal was overrefined to his very fingertips—one imagines God to have been his manicurist; Strauss was full of pawky common sense—a practical man of the theater, the world, and the people. The poet was always trying to elevate Strauss, whom he found somewhat vulgar; the composer was always trying to bring Hofmannsthal out of the clouds and down to earth. Out of this push-and-pull emerged their joint genius.

The Strauss–Hofmannsthal correspondence is the finest available account of a composer-librettist collaboration.[1] Quite

1 *A Working Friendship: The Correspondence Between Richard Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannsthal* (Random) is ably, although a trifle reductively, translated by Hanns Hammelmann and Ewald Osers, and it is regrettable that they based their translation on the 1952 German edition, rather than on the expanded later ones. I prefer, however, to make my own translations. In the case of *Rosenkavalier*, though, there is another correspondence as important: *Hugo von Hofmannsthal–Harry Graf Kessler: Briefwechsel 1898–1929* (Insel Verlag). As Hofmannsthal himself has stated, "The scenario was really evolved in conversation with the friend to whom the libretto is dedicated, Count Harry Kessler." The letters that passed between Hofmannsthal and Kessler—they should be translated into English—reveal that Kessler's input was almost considerable enough to entitle him to the status of co-librettist, which Hofmannsthal only partly acknowledged in the dedication of the book edition of the text to Kessler. The character of Ochs, crude but not totally so, owes especially much to Kessler, as does the increased virility of the originally overdelicate Octavian.

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early during the work on *Rosenkavalier*, Hofmannsthal admonishes Strauss: "True and lasting success is compounded of the effect on both the crude and the refined elements in the audience, with the latter providing the prestige without which one is just as lost as without popular appeal." And there, precisely, lies the greatness of this opera. Unlike such a later masterpiece as *Ariadne auf Naxos*—which despite its commedia dell'arte subplot ultimately appeals more to the refined audience—or the almost too cerebral *Capriccio*, *Rosenkavalier* has always been equally prized by the wider public and the congnoscenti.

However, the selection of this work for the City Opera was a priori questionable. It is a big, opulent piece, not to be conceived of in an unlavish production. And although the choice of Jonathan Miller as director, given his outsized reputation in both musical and nonmusical theater, may have seemed a sound one, it proved, in the event, a liability. I don't know whether it was Miller's or the management's idea to situate the action in the period when the opera was written (1909–10) rather than in that in which it takes place (the rococo of Empress Maria Theresia, circa 1750). The result, though cheaper to produce, is hard to take. Quite aside from the fact that the German spoken in the reign of that good monarch—faithfully re-imagined in the libretto—was substantially different from that of 1910 Vienna in the throes of a most decadent casualness, there are also equally important societal differences. With World War I was to come the end of the aristocracy and empire, and a social leveling that men like Hofmannsthal could only deplore.

We need to see a still hierarchic, genuinely aristocratic society in Act One, in the Marschallin's bedroom—see it in the manners, in the set and costumes, the nature of the household servants, and the princess's *levée* with all the attendant minor characters, some of them riffraff, but classier, eighteenth-century riffraff. It allows the noble nature of the Marschallin—her name, Maria Theresia, suggests spiritual kinship, perhaps even an intended identity, with the beloved empress, who for a while made a matriarchy out of Austria. So it is right that the Marschallin should be the *meneur du jeu*; it is she who pulls the strings of, and adds the deeper notes to, the comedy.

In the second act, we are to see the palace of the nouveau riche, only recently ennobled bourgeois, Herr von Faninal, Sophie's father. The wealth should be ostentatious, the taste somewhat dubious. But here, as in Act One, the set is a depleted, impoverished thing, as if robberies in turn-of-the-century Vienna were emptying the palaces of all their appointments. In the grand reception hall *chez* Faninal, there are two chairs, and one huge mythological painting with the crate it came in leaning against a wall, nothing more. There is a glassed-in corridor running, somewhat at an angle, along the back, beyond which we can see a row of identical gilded statues: Bourdelle's *Herakles* of 1909, something even the worst parvenu would not have acquired so soon, and replicated so copiously. And what are those things under the windows: banquettes or radiators?

The setting for the third act, a private room of a Viennese inn, where Baron Ochs tries to seduce the maidservant Mariandl (actually Octavian in disguise), is no longer a typical *Gasthaus*, but some sort of flimsy movie set with overtones of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. I am sure that neither the set designer, Peter J. Davison, nor the costumer, Sue Blane, had much of a budget to work with. Even so, with a little imagination, Davison could have done better, and Miss Blane should not have given Faninal's servants, in ghastly irony, rococo costumes and perukes, while Octavian (in the opening scene) lounges about in pajamas, somewhat premature even for 1910.

And what did Jonathan Miller contribute? Take a longish bit (some five to seven minutes) in Act One, when the Marschallin is being pessimistic while Octavian, back in men's clothes, sulks. He is kneeling on the footstool that leads to the very high

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bed, his arms flung out across the sheets, his head buried in the bedclothes. It looks for all the world as if he were trying to smell some of the traces of last night's lovemaking. And what kind of brave youth is this Octavian who rushes to the Baron from the rear and, instead of wounding him in a bona fide duel as the text calls for, stabs him from behind? And granted that the nascent love between Sophie and Octavian is not easy to stage, must they mostly stand around like two sticks waiting to be rubbed together to produce a spark? And would Baron Ochs, as the marriage contract is about to be signed, practically rape Sophie, dragging her to one of those two chairs and successfully forcing her onto his knees? And would the girl, disengaging herself, knock him off his chair? Later, he even waves her about in the air, as if she were a life-size puppet.

Since the great hall at Faninal's is as empty as the floor of a dance studio, Valzacchi and Annina, the intriguers, lack the two big stoves to hide behind, and simply sashay in as if Octavian and Sophie were blind. And so on and on. Even political correctness takes its toll. The Marschallin has a little black page, Mohammed, who brings in the breakfast and, later, brings down the final curtain as he comes on to retrieve his mistress's dropped handkerchief. Here he is a little white child-servant of the sort that did not exist.

Hofmannsthal's incomparably nuanced language is wholly lost in the surtitles. We get stuff like "Call the doctor before he dies on me," weird inversions such as "What must I first do?," and even such howlers as "different than." The Marschallin is formally announced as "The lady field marshal," and the right and proper *Herr Kavalier* is variously transmogrified into "Gentleman, Sir" and "Mister Gentleman." Not that the German is treated much better by the singers, as when Octavian perpetrates the impossible inversion, "So gut ich weiß sie selber nicht einmal."[2]

Yes, yes, you say, but what about the conductor, the orchestra, the singers? How was the City Opera to meet Strauss's requirements, which call for an orchestra of 112, nineteen of them onstage in Act Three? The available players, under the baton of Alexander Sander (a Viennese, though you wouldn't guess it from his conducting), take what has been called "an immense concert waltz" and turn it into something clunky and foursquare. In his excellent *Richard Strauss: The Man and His Work* (Collet's), Ernst Krause observed that the opera "has always given most pleasure on the stage when the lilting Viennese element has been emphasized by the cast, and also from the conductor's desk." Here, in both quarters, the emphasis seems to be on de-emphasizing. The tempos do not flow, do not melt into one another; legato is practically unknown. And the sound, of course, remains undernourished throughout, never swelling to those proverbial Straussian climaxes. And when Strauss specifies cutting down on the strings to let the singers be heard, the chamber effects remain practically indistinguishable from the tutti.

The singers may be even more disastrous. It has been repeatedly asserted that only Austrians can do full justice to the lingo, but what is heard here, despite sporadic efforts to the contrary, is barely even German. Take the Baron of Kenneth Cox, who, perhaps on the example of Cox and Box, seems never there where Ochs ought to be. He lacks the rotundity associated with the character, and the boorish bonhomie; he is stiff, gawky, and walks with a clumsy shuffle. There is no Viennese flavor, no buffo quality, and certainly no *basso cantante*. In Ochs's greatest line, "Mit mir . . . keine Nacht dir zu lang," the low E on *lang* with which Act Two ends emerges as the "aaaaa" of a congested patient having his throat examined.

As the Marschallin, the still pretty Elizabeth Holleque is sadly at sea. Her never

2 The original is "So gut weiß ich sie selber nicht einmal" ("I don't know them that well myself").

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very big soprano can be heard at its best—or is it merely electronic enhancement?—on a 1988 recording of the Shostakovich Fourteenth Symphony (Chandos 8607); on the stage of the State Theater in 1996 you can hardly make it out. Nor does the singer display notable histrionic gifts. The great outcry, "Die Zeit, sie is ein sonderbar Ding"; the melancholy sigh to her hairdresser, "Heut haben sie ein altes Weib aus mir gemacht"; and that final, wistful "Ja, ja," with which she lets go of her young lover, all go begging. Nowhere does Miss Holleque convey what Max Mell has correctly pinpointed as "the one deeper, poetic theme, that of time passing, of renunciation."

Even paltrier is the Octavian of Gwendolyn Jones, a big lummox of a woman who is actually more convincing in male drag. But that is her sole achievement. The part can be sung by either a soprano or a mezzo, but Miss Jones, for all we can hear out of her, might as well be a whispering baritone. The absence of charm and acting ability is total. When one thinks of all the great Octavians of yesterday and today, all duly recorded on CD—Sena Jurinac, Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, Elisabeth Grümmer, Irmgard Seefried, Christa Ludwig, Anne Sofie von Otter—and then adverts to Miss Jones, one's stomach turns queasy. The Sophie of Nancy Allen Lundy is, though relatively inoffensive, small potatoes, and the subsidiary parts are—shall we say?—mashed potatoes; Richard Woods, as the Police Commissioner, seems to speak, not even to sing, his role. Jan Opalach, as Faninal, comes off best, though not in his acting.

No one coming cold to this *Rosenkavalier* could begin to sense what a masterpiece is being torn to shreds here. As the Earl of Harewood noted,

> Strauss's invention is expressive and memorable, Hofmannsthal's elegant and a model of sensibility. One of the finest fruits of their collaboration is a kind of fast-moving musical conversation, always apt to situation, full of character, a unique example of speech heightened by music, which neither descends to banality nor blurs the conversational outline with too lyrical a musical overlay.

And, in a similar vein, David Murray writes,

> Strauss outdoes Wagner with dramatic music in which distinctions between recitative, arioso, and formal set pieces are continuously blurred. Unaccompanied lines may have as much lyrical force—and even as much weight in the musical argument—as the big tunes, and Strauss tacks mercurially between these modes.

Of course, there have always been naysayers such as that well-known idiot savant Joseph Kerman, who writes in his vastly overrated *Opera as Drama*, "No one who understood *The Marriage of Figaro* could ever have taken *Der Rosenkavalier* seriously," and adds, "*Salome* and *Der Rosenkavalier* . . . are insincere in every gesture, meretricious and doubly meretricious on account of their show of outer formal integrity," the last part of which I can make no sense of at all, singly or doubly. Hofmannsthal himself sometimes voiced his impatience with Strauss's alleged "dreadful tendency toward the trivial," and even wrote to Harry Kessler, concerning *Rosenkavalier*, "He won't kill it, but it will be as far removed from Beardsley as a Bavarian cow from dancing the minuet." (I can see the connection between Beardsley and *Salome*, but Beardsley and *Rosenkavalier*?) Yet in the long run even Hofmannsthal realized how much he owed to the composer's pragmatism and inexhaustible melodiousness.

Perhaps it is Claude Rostand who put it best, defining Strauss as "a prodigious artist to whom musical progressivism will not owe very much, but to whom troubled and often tragic times will owe some of the most marvelous pleasures music can offer."

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The media

For the lady from Dubuque

by James Bowman

When you think about it, the marriage of fashion and feminism, presided over by the ever more sacerdotal *New Yorker*, has a certain inevitability to it. Even the depiction of a female counterpart to the magazine's trademark Regency dandy, Eustace Tilley, on the cover of its special issue for February 26–March 4 looks far more convincing as an emblem of elegance than poor old Eustace ever did. The naturalness of the union is presumably why it occurs to none of the authors represented in this number, not even the self-proclaimed "crone," Mary Daly, that the sisters might be slightly compromised in their claim to intellectual seriousness when their effusions, their complaints, their confessions, their manifestos, are all sponsored by slick photos of emaciated model-girls promising sexual power over men with the help of Versace or Estée Lauder or Calvin Klein or Donna Karan.

"What is it that makes a woman alluring?" asks the sniffer-ad for Chanel's Allure. "What is that intangible that turns heads and touches hearts, catches your eye and holds you with its power?" Whether or not Allure is the answer to these questions, it is pretty clear that political correctness and a preternatural alertness to slights from unreconstructed patriarchs is *not* the answer. Yet the bundling of sex appeal with sex antagonism in this way is oddly conformable to the feminine stereotype. The message of the whole ensemble is the rather reassuring one that *les femmes* want to continue being to men what they have always been—that is, in the brutal language of the doctrinaire feminist, "sex objects"—but that they want the right to moan and complain and bellyache and, well, bitch about it. Feminism—like fashion in this, too, perhaps—is therapy.

Although, according to Dorothy Wickenden's curtain-raising "Sister Acts," the party label of "feminism" has itself hitherto seemed as out-of-fashion as bell bottoms or mood rings, the reality of it has ever been thus. Jane Kramer's "Invisible Woman," a nostalgic reminiscence of covering the birth of modern American feminism for *The New Yorker* in 1970, makes this clear:

> I spent the next few months with those women—"the founding cadre" is what I called them—working on a Profile of their group and listening to them engage in a new and purportedly therapeutic kind of conversation called consciousness-raising. I would describe it now as a conversation about being women, about the politics of being women, but in those days, before everything from kicking drugs to finding God was called a recovery program, it had the furtive air of bathhouse sex or, indeed, of dinner alone (or together), spooned out of an ice-cream carton.

It is ultimately this excitement, this quasi-erotic thrill (perhaps connected to an Abbie Hoffman-like understanding of "revolution" as being something you do "for the

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hell of it") which lies behind Jane Kramer's rationale for her justification of the feminist as bourgeois revolutionary:

> I am just enough of a Marxist to know that any modern revolution begins with bourgeois revolution—that revolution is about capital, even (or especially) when that capital is your soul or your psyche or your own "space," or whatever else your particular moment of history chooses to call the person.

What she resolutely avoids, however, is the question of how largely her revolution seems both to begin and end with mere bourgeois consciousness-raising. There is an unintentionally comic moment in her piece when she describes her experience of addressing a meeting in Levittown, Pennsylvania, at which she was shouted down.

> I decided that night that I could do more for the cause on Central Park West than in Levittown, and I think I was right, since not much consciousness-raising went on in places like Levittown until Oprah and Donahue tapped into the pastimes and practices of a Puritan America that most of Puritan America had forgotten.

This makes it especially rich that she resents conservative women—women who, she says, are "pitted against real feminists in order to entertain, and perhaps excite the kind of men who might otherwise be enjoying female jello wrestling"—for "the way they accuse women I admire of sitting around talking feminism to each other instead of 'reaching out' to women on welfare, women in factories, women with too little money or too many babies." She resents it, of course, because for her feminism *is* "sitting around talking feminism" and is no more relevant to the lives of the women with too little money or too many babies than it was to the good burghers of Levittown. This is so obvious that she is required to go to extraordinary lengths to establish a rhetorical connection between her 1970 New York feminists and genuinely distressed womankind. The latter is represented by a fourteen-year-old Moroccan girl called Amina whom Kramer once befriended and whose treatment by a polygamist and traditional Muslim society was brutal in the extreme. Amina, she tells us, suffered because she was essentially an invisible person in the eyes of the dominant culture once her marketability as a bride was past. Jane Kramer had an epiphany of fellow feeling with this sense of invisibility in Morocco and then brought it home with her to New York.

> The women who got together a year later in Manhattan had one thing in common besides their sex and their politics and their privilege: at one time or another, they had all felt this damage, this same shattering invisibility. And they had been as unprepared for it as I was that day on the Tangier dock, and even as Amina must have been when she came to on the floor of a clay hut and discovered her wedding going on around her.

Perhaps Amina ought to have been asked if she would agree that what these pampered daughters of privilege were experiencing was "this same shattering invisibility." Or if invisibility were, after all, quite the most shattering thing she had to cope with.

But Jane Kramer's unwillingness to make what would seem to be a pretty elementary distinction between poor Amina's fate and that of the New Yorkers is not inadvertent. She proudly defends her own "bourgeois feminism" against what she calls "the Roseanne fallacy" or "the assumption that getting battered in a trailer park gives a woman more insight into women's lives than a tenure battle at Harvard." Insight into women's lives be damned! the trailer park punching bag might be excused for saying. That's the kind of thing you can worry about when you've never been beaten up. Does not her grievance have a lot more claim on our attention than that of the Harvard feminist? I wonder what Roseanne—who, James Wolcott proudly tells us, was involved in the planning of this issue—

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thinks of her eponymous "fallacy"? Alas, the question seems not to have been asked of her. I imagine Jane Kramer values the shape of her nose too much.

For the ostentatiously aggressive Roseanne could be considered as one of the unforeseen consequences of all those years of "sitting around talking feminism." At the margins of this "revolution" there will always be some people who take it a little too seriously for the sort of trendies who call *The New Yorker* home. One such is Mary Daly, whose contribution to this issue, "Sin Big," is (Wolcott reveals) one of Roseanne's many bright ideas. Now Mary Daly is, at least to a scion of the patriarchy like me, self-evidently crazy.

> There were also vital messages from nature. Especially important was a startling communication from a clover blossom one summer day when I was about fourteen. It said, with utmost simplicity, "I am." It was an experience that I would later call "an intuition of Be-ing, the Verb in which we all participate." Such invitations to my adolescent spirit were somehow intimately connected with the call of books. It was this encounter that launched me on my quest to become a Radical Feminist philosopher.

As an R.F.P., she says,

> I came to see that all of the so-called major religions—from buddhism and hinduism to islam, judaism, and christianity [*sic, sic, sic, sic,* and *sic*], as well as such secular derivatives as freudianism, jungianism, marxism, and maoism—are mere sects, infrastructures of the edifice of patriarchy. All are erected as parts of the male's shelter against anomie—that is unpredictability and disorder. And the symbolic message is this: women are the dreaded anomie ("the enemy"). We are the real objects under attack in all the wars of a patriarchy.

The voices, the anger at invisible enemies, and the neologisms ("misterical behavior," "academentia," "bore-ocrats," "andocracy," "Wickedary"—as in *Websters' First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language*, co-edited by the author)—are all classic signs of paranoid schizophrenia, and it would be interesting to know if Mary Daly would claim that the very existence of such a condition, like freudianism, can be attributed to the self-protecting patriarchy.

At any rate, if she has not cheerfully given up her right to be taken seriously by anyone not very far gone in commitment to the sisterhood, "seriousness" itself must be redefined. In response to the murder of a lesbian, for instance, Mary Daly and some feminist friends staged what they called "A Dramatic Indictment of Gynocide" at Harvard in 1989. After the story of the murder was told,

> I pronounced a Nemesis Hex, thus setting the scene for a Dramatic Indictment.
>
> A stern bailiff stalked to the lectern and shouted, "Wild Witches will now expose and condemn the massacre of women's minds, bodies, and spirits. Bring in the accused!" Accompanied by a thunderous beating of drums, black-robed members of the Witches' Chorus carried flamboyantly dressed, balloon-headed wooden dummies, representing agents of gynocide and biocide, down the aisle and onto the stage. Among the dummies were Jack the Ripper, figurehead for serial killers; Exxon, figurehead for Earth rapers of every kind; Sigmund Freud, figurehead for all professional mindfuckers; Boss-town College (dressed as a football wearing a roman collar), figurehead for the brain-drainers of academia.
>
> After hearing the evidence in each case, the Witches of Boston (the whole audience) shouted: "GUILTY!"
>
> As High Chaircrone, I sentenced the dummies to de-heading. "Off with their heads!" shouted the women, as the jailers, flourishing sharp-edged labryses, descended upon the accused and popped their balloon heads. After this event, more than one woman said, "Patriarchy doesn't exist Here, Now."

Labryses? Look that one up in your Wickedary! It is an interesting question why such

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ravings from an obviously deranged person do not embarrass the (equally obviously) sane sisters who share this forum with her? I put forward the tentative explanation that, since feminism is simply about moaning and complaining anyway, it must have seemed a good idea to Tina Brown, or Roseanne, to have a really spectacularly good complainer as one of the company. For if the point of it all is only complaint and whining and moaning and bellyaching, it matters little that her complaining is merely delusional. The sisters share the stage with her in the same way that the brothers share a stage with Louis Farrakhan: because he puts the fear of God into the opposition. Man, that's one crazy woman! We'd better give her what she wants!

To say that the politics of "feminism," like that of "civil rights," is largely about such gamesmanship these days is not to deny that there is a political dimension to either one that is worth taking seriously. Katha Pollitt writes a typically intelligent and rhetorically effective (even if *ad hominem*) political piece skewering the Republicans without ever seeming to regard them, as others of the writers herein seem to do, as less than human. It does not occur to Dorothy Wickenden and Judith Shulevitz, speaking for the magazine in Comment and The Talk of the Town, that it is even possible intellectually to engage with a Republican. Jane Kramer says that the new generation of feminists is puzzled to read

> that *their* Congress is in the hands of people who despise feminism. For them, safe in New York, the 104th Congress of the United States belongs to people from some other country, not their own. George Bush—with the famous "fifteen million abortions" spin that sold his soul to the religious right—was the last public enemy they had who was familiar enough to be real to them.

Yet for all her comparatively level-headed analysis, Katha Pollitt hardly troubles herself any more than Jane Kramer over the problems of identifying feminism with "progressive" political attitudes on welfare, Federal budget policy, etc. The problems are not, perhaps, so much for feminism as they are for progressivism, which runs the risk of marginalizing itself as the political arm of the women's movement instead of appealing to a more general idea of the public good. That is really the historic problem with progressivism in America: it can never stick to the commonweal for long before being hijacked by one or more of the most powerful of its constituencies for their own ends. What big labor did to the progressivism of the early part of the century, feminism and "civil rights" is doing to it now.

Jane Kramer's Manichaean approach to politics is not entirely absent here, and it is a problem not only for progressivism but also for feminism, which also suffers from excluding women who have the temerity to think more like a Republican than like Katha Pollitt. There has always been a Marxist cast to identity politics: if all relations between the sexes (or between social classes, or races) are reducible to power struggle, then there simply can be no such thing as "Republican women." They would be like leonine zebras or avian worms: the prey cannot identify itself with the predator. Republicans are the political agents of the patriarchy, which is by definition opposed to women. Therefore women who describe themselves as Republicans must be, as Gloria Steinem said of Senator Kay Bailey Hutchinson, "female impersonators."

The question, then, for the Marxist lasses is: do they have the balls to follow the logic of their position to its logical conclusion? Do they have the Stalinist ruthlessness to make a go of their revolution? Even poor mad Mary Daly has so far only managed to decapitate men in effigy. Is Katha Pollitt really serious about her political convictions, or does she just want to complain and bellyache like the rest of the sisterhood? This is perhaps an unfair question, since seriousness for the sisterhood so rarely means anything more than bellyaching—or endless reiterations of "women's

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choices." Dorothy Wickenden writes, interestingly, that

> choice itself, and not any particular choice, has been the real goal of the women's movement. And what the experience of the generation since "women's lib" demonstrates is that choice is not an answer to the question of how life should be lived, only a condition for answering that question freely.

But the feminist answer to the question of "how life should be lived" is not exactly a Socratic one and rarely seems to get beyond the eternally interesting question of how to balance work and family. Do not even feminists sometimes get tired of pieces such as Mark Singer's here which, under the rubric of Domestic Life, gives an exhaustingly literary account of the domestic rounds of a professional woman turned mother? Is there not a metaphysical sameness to such narratives like unto that of pornography?

In fact, you could say that endless reiterations of the same stories of women *coping* (rather than copulating) are feminist pornography. They excite and titillate by their sense of possibility so much that their dramatic monotony is overlooked. Yet deep down, the feminists know that they are only playing around at the edges of serious thinking—which is what makes them so cross when you don't treat them with the seriousness they think they deserve. They cannot but be aware of the stigma of triviality suggested by Tina Brown's saying (according to *Newsweek*) that "William Shawn never read copy while he got his legs waxed at 6 in the morning on the kitchen floor," or of the leggy models bracketing what purport to be serious discussions of politics, or of passages like this one from the Singer piece, called "Mom Overboard!"

> Friends of Sera's gave a New Year's Eve party and invited a Tarot card reader, a palm reader, and an astrologer. The palm reader told Sera that she had a tendency to get into traps, and she didn't enjoy hearing that, because it implied that motherhood was a trap. The good news came when she gave the astrologer the dates and hours of her children's births and was informed that many of the signs were auspicious. "Thad has, like, eight planets that are cardinal signs in the tenth house, which means he can't help being famous," she said. "When he's twenty—it will be just the tip of the iceberg—he's going to be incredible."

That kind of triviality infects even a typically cagy piece by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. on Hillary Clinton. Gates manages to suggest at one and the same time that there is something pathological about the antipathies that Mrs. Clinton seems to arouse and that there is some reason for them. As with so many of the articles in this issue, the real point of it seems to lie in the words, or the symbolic details, rather than the ostensible tendency of his argument. No one having read this piece will ever henceforth be able to forget the description by an anonymous friend who is quoted as saying:

> "Hillary's the sort of friend who'd undo an extra button on your blouse when you are about to go on a date. She wants to know who you're going out with." [. . .] "She's a real girl," Mandy Grunwald says. "There's a part of her that is constantly commenting on whether you got your hair cut, how it looks, your clothes."

Just so. And it is because it really is this that constitutes being "a real girl" and not the kind of philosophizing on which both Mrs. Clinton's and *The New Yorker*'s justification of themselves is ostensibly based, that we know we don't have to take either one of them seriously. Gates writes airily of the First Lady's "demonization" by the mainstream press, but he also seems to see that, like the madness of Mary Daly, this is the very thing that allows us to take "a real girl" seriously.

His plea for her is, in a manner of speaking, based on an appeal to this everyday humanity. Why can't we just see Hillary as neither a saint nor a sinner but an ordinary

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woman with important things to say in our political debate?

> Granted the First Lady neither sparkles nor suppurates, but why are we so certain that reality is always to be found *behind* her public persona, her stated political views, opinions, and values? Why are we so certain that the truth is what has been concealed, and not, like the purloined letter, what's in plain sight?

Well, there is a very simple answer to that: because when we see a conflict between pious word and sordid deed, we have too much experience with the paradigm not to assume that it is the sordid deed which is the superior reality. That is what is called hypocrisy. Gates's attempt to excuse the deed for the sake of the word is an acquiescence in the Clinton politics of gesture. The attempt to mystify it (just imagine! there seems to be some complexity, some conflict between what she says and what she does) ends up being little more than Clinton administration public relations.

There are, let it be said, many good things in this number. I find it a very hopeful datum that several of the cartoons, for instance, are able to take a detached, ironic view of "the revolution" that the rest of the magazine takes so seriously. I especially liked the little girl saying: "I love you too, Daddy, but it just kills me that you're a man." Or another little girl saying to her mother about her smug brother: "Why does *he* always get to be the boy?" Or the woman executive saying into her office intercom: "Bring me the head of John the Baptist. Just kidding. Get me the Paulson file." Or the cave man chatting up the cave woman at a prehistoric cocktail party: "So *you're* the little lady who invented the wheel. Do tell me more." Best of all are the "Bad Mom" trading cards—nine examples of guilt-making for mothers, presented as baseball cards: "Esther J.: Ran out of orange juice one morning and served kids orange soda instead," for example, or "Jayne R.: Sent child to school with 99.1° F. temperature—and *child was sent home*." Or "Deborah Z.: Has never even *tried* to make Play-Doh from scratch."

Daphne Merkin's account of her hitherto hidden desire to be spanked is, if somewhat out of place here, at least compulsively readable. As are the brilliant Anna Deavere Smith's transcribed interviews with some inmates from a women's prison in Maryland. Francine Du Plessix Gray's plea for growing old gracefully and without hormone replacement suggests one area, at least, where nature and feminism ought to have a common interest. Mary Lefkowitz writes a brief but interesting survey of ancient gynecological practice. Arlene Croce's discussion of the question: "Is the Muse Dead?"—is a *tour de force* of twentieth-century cultural history that, by defending artistic muse-worship against the predictable strictures of mainstream feminism, quietly but decisively undermines the gimcrack politics of much of the rest of the magazine.

Also well worth the read is Nancy Franklin's memoir of Katharine White, who was by way of being the *New Yorker*'s muse as the editorial confidante and collaborator of Harold Ross and William Shawn, the wife of E. B. White and the mother of Roger Angell. Perhaps the most poignant moment of the whole two-hundred-page issue comes when Nancy Franklin quotes Katharine White's attempt in 1944 to persuade Helen Hokinson not to leave *The New Yorker* in order to become a syndicated newspaper columnist—a move that would mean "being typed as woman page stuff." In her note to Ross about their conversation, Mrs. White tells him: "I told her I thought she ought to feel it as much of a comedown as I would feel it if I had to give up being an editor of *The New Yorker* for being an editor of a fashion magazine." Happily, she could not have foreseen the day when being an editor of *The New Yorker* and being an editor of a fashion magazine would be one and the same thing.

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Books

An infinitely worldly clubman

by John Gross

Malcolm Muggeridge was already in his fifties when he first tasted real fame, but after that things moved fast. The Muggeridge boom began in Britain with his controversial editorship of *Punch* (1953–1957). His attacks on the cult of the Royal Family (mildness itself by today's standards) brought him notoriety on both sides of the Atlantic; by the 1960s, television had taken him up in a big way, and he seemed to be in demand everywhere, as broadcaster, journalist, lecturer, and "personality." For the next twenty years or so he was to remain an almost inescapable feature of the media landscape. And then it all faded, quite quickly. When Richard Ingrams's biography appeared in Britain last year,[1] I was struck by how little stir it caused—a reflection on the subject, I think, rather than on the book itself. Ten years earlier, there would have been review-articles, reappraisals, a general buzz of excitement. Now nobody had anything much to say: the caravan had moved on. Yet Muggeridge's story was well worth telling. The achievements may not especially endure—few of them were meant to—but the career retains an undeniable interest.

He was born Thomas Malcolm Muggeridge, in 1903. The "Thomas" was in honor of Thomas Carlyle, who was one of his father's heroes; he grew up in a home where money was short, but where there was plenty of time for talk and ideas. The biggest idea of all was socialism. His father, whom he doted on, had left school at thirteen and worked his way up from office boy to company secretary; he was also an early Fabian, a veteran of town-hall politics, and for two brief years (when Malcolm was already grown up) a Member of Parliament. Socialism was his life, though it was socialism tempered, in the spirit of those times, by a devout respect for culture. He read Shakespeare aloud to his family, and played Beethoven on the pianola. The first book he bought for Malcolm, when he was eleven, was called *A Pageant of English Poetry*. It was a present that the boy cherished.

The example of home counted for a good deal more with Muggeridge than the example of school. At seven—around the age his future friends George Orwell and Anthony Powell were starting out at preparatory school, as a prelude to Eton—he had begun attending a state elementary school in south London. (His first teacher there, Helen Corke, was currently involved with D. H. Lawrence, who was teaching at another school nearby.) At twelve, he won a scholarship to a local grammar school, where he was to be chiefly remembered as talkative, excitable, "a bit of a chump." He generally ended up in the bottom half of the class. But he could do better when he forced himself to, since he managed to secure a place at Cambridge.

Two aspects of his life in Cambridge

1 *Malcolm Muggeridge: The Biography*, by Richard Ingrams; HarperCollins, 264 pages, $27.50.

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deserve comment. First, although there was nothing in his purely secular upbringing to account for it, he embarked on a prolonged religious phase. He was confirmed twice into the Church of England—once to satisfy college regulations, the second time to show that he meant it; he even considered being ordained. Secondly, he adjusted to what was still the heavily upper-class atmosphere of the university with remarkable ease. However much he may have rejected public-school values, he had no qualms about adopting a public-school manner. He returned home at the end of his first term with a brand-new accent and some brand-new slang; according to Ingrams he even insisted on addressing his parents, hitherto known as Mum and Dad, as "Mater" and "Pater." (When she first met Pater, incidentally, Mater had been a working-class girl from Sheffield.) Some of the slang was subsequently dropped, but the accent remained, and for the rest of his days Muggeridge continued to give a brilliant impersonation—with perhaps just a hint of caricature—of a well-connected, infinitely worldly clubman.

Soon after graduating, he left to take up a teaching post at a college in India. As Richard Ingrams says (quoting from the letters he wrote at the time), his response to the newness and strangeness of his surroundings was much more positive than the impression conveyed in the world-weary memoirs he wrote in the 1970s. He got on well with his Indian colleagues, and developed a strong admiration for Gandhi. But boredom soon set in, as it was often to do in the course of his career—reinforced on this occasion by the loss of his Christian faith. (The college was a Christian foundation.) He preached a provocative sermon in the chapel, and published an article attacking the college's "dead" teaching—"wax hyacinths and pink paper roses imprinted from the West." It was time for him to be going. He returned to England, taught for a while, then took up another college post in Cairo. Finally, after a series of not very successful attempts to get into print, his luck turned. In 1929 he went to Manchester and joined the staff of the *Manchester Guardian*.

By this time he had got married. Kitty, his wife, was a formidable person in her own right. (She needed to be, to stay the course with him.) She was also a niece of Beatrice Webb, who had been a dominant influence in her early life: her mother and Beatrice were daughters of a celebrated industrialist, the friend of many leading figures in Victorian society, and for Muggeridge marrying into the clan was a decided step upwards. Beatrice, a snob in spite of herself, would never have felt at ease with Muggeridge senior (she described him as "a Fabian and very worthy person, though of modest means") but his son—"the most intellectually stimulating and pleasant mannered of all my 'in-laws' "—was another matter. She and Malcolm took an immediate liking to each other; later on, the connection enabled him to study the uppermost levels of British fellow-traveling at close quarters.

Thanks to his job, he was also given a privileged view of one of the last prominent survivors of Victorian Liberalism. When he first joined the *Guardian*, it was still edited by C. P. Scott, who had been appointed to the post in 1872, when Disraeli and Gladstone were in their prime. After Muggeridge left, he painted a cruel picture of Scott (under whom the paper had acquired a world-wide reputation) in a novel which had to be withdrawn before publication, as the result of a libel action brought by Scott's successor. For anyone interested in the inner history of the British press, Ingrams's account of the background to this episode will make absorbing reading. But for the world at large, the important thing is that in 1932 the *Guardian* sent Muggeridge to Moscow for a few months while their regular Russian correspondent went on leave.

For Muggeridge, and equally for Kitty, who accompanied him, the assignment represented much more than a professional opportunity. His experience in India and Egypt had sharpened his instinctively left-

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wing views. He had taken to calling himself a Communist (and to wearing a red tie); in Cairo, he had even started learning Russian. What appealed to him about the Soviet experiment had little or nothing to do with Marxism. He spoke of it, in a vague fashion, as embodying "new values," "a new kind of civilization." It was everything that capitalism wasn't. Kitty concurred, and they set out for Moscow with the intention of settling there permanently. Aunt Beatrice lent them money to help ease their way.

Muggeridge was far too intelligent to maintain his illusions about life under the Soviets for long. But intelligence wasn't enough: Walter Duranty was an intelligent man, and we know what kind of stories he filed from Russia during the same period. The issue was essentially one of character, and whatever was cussed and contrarian—and honest—in Muggeridge's nature stood him in good stead. He was determined not to deceive himself, and not to deceive others; still less was he tempted to succumb, in Duranty fashion, to the blandishments of Soviet power.

His scope in Moscow was limited by the fact that when he got there he found that the man he was replacing was not yet ready to leave. At first he was restricted to carrying out occasional assignments and submitting pieces on a freelance basis. Within a short time, however, he had succeeded in ruffling feathers. In January 1933, the *Guardian* ran a story by him referring to accounts he had heard of the enormous suffering being caused by the collectivization of agriculture. (It drew a rejoinder in the shape of an indignant letter signed by Bernard Shaw and other Soviet sympathizers.) Then he persuaded the paper to underwrite a journey to southern Russia and the northern Caucasus, so that he could see what was happening for himself. The result was an important three-part report which appeared toward the end of March, the first eyewitness account of the full ravages of collectivization by a Western correspondent. The editor of the *Guardian*—C. P. Scott's successor—didn't tamper with the articles, but he was uneasy with them, and soon afterwards Muggeridge found himself being blue-penciled: the paper toned down his reports of the arrest of a group of engineers working for the British firm Metropolitan-Vickers, as the prelude to a notorious show trial. He resigned abruptly, and left Moscow just as the trial was about to begin.

Later, he regretted not having stayed longer; according to Ingrams, he was haunted by the thought that his departure might have been prompted by fear. But sixty years on, we are far more likely to be impressed by the courage he showed in speaking out as strongly as he did about the Soviet regime, not least because he knew that it meant antagonizing many of those close to him—the historian A. J. P. Taylor, for instance, with whom the Muggeridges had shared a house in Manchester. Writing to Beatrice Webb in January 1933, he was particularly forthright:

> You'll say I haven't seen enough, haven't met enough Russians, have mixed too much with foreign diplomats, but I've seen, I know I've seen, the essence of the thing, its spirit, the mood it engenders, the kind of person in whom it invests power, the set of values—moral, aesthetic, spiritual—it encourages. And I'm more sure than I've ever been sure of anything in my life that this is bad and that it is based on the most evil and cruel elements in human nature.

Needless to say this did nothing to deflect Beatrice from her worship of Lenin and Stalin, and in a sense she already knew what he was telling her; it was just that she put a different gloss on it. Before he set out for Russia, he had paid her a farewell visit, and he never forgot the sight of her warming her hands by the fire and suddenly announcing, "It's true that in the USSR people *disappear*." The remark was made, he added, "more in an envious than accusatory tone."

In 1934 he published a novel based on his Russian experience, *Winter In Moscow*. It was a valuable book at the time, and it is still well worth reading: it contains partic-

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ularly entertaining sketches of Western correspondents in Moscow, and of gullible or willingly gulled Western visitors—"political pilgrims." Unfortunately, it is also marred by a series of anti-Semitic comments. They are not what the book is about; they don't cancel out its virtues. But they do represent a serious blemish—serious enough for the historian Leonard Schapiro to have reluctantly changed his mind about writing an introduction to a new edition which was mooted in 1983. (Ingrams prints part of the admirably fair-minded letter in which Schapiro bowed out.)

Opposition to Communism was to remain a consistent theme in Muggeridge's career, but it was only one theme among many. After Russia he seemed more restless than ever. He took a job with the International Labour Organization in Geneva, which he detested; he went out to India again, for what was meant to be a three-year stint on the *Calcutta Statesman*, but came back after only a year; he spent a fruitless spell on the gossip column of an evening paper. Finally he and Kitty and their four small children settled in the Sussex countryside. He kept going by turning out articles and reviews, but the aim was to write books. In 1936 he published a study of Samuel Butler, which a publisher had commissioned before Muggeridge left for India, and for which Kitty had done much of the research while he was away. In 1938 he published another novel, *In a Valley of This Restless Mind*. (Ingrams doesn't make any great claims for it.) When the Second World War broke out, he was still at work on his essay in contemporary history, *The Thirties*; he completed it, not long after joining the Intelligence Corps, in a barracks hut.

The book on Butler was a minor bombshell. It had been commissioned on what must have seemed the reasonable assumption that Muggeridge would find the author of *The Way of All Flesh* a congenial subject. Instead, he produced a hostile, essentially satirical portrait—a case of the debunker debunked. If it were published today, it would probably provoke howls of "Homophobia!" and that was the subtext of much of the angry comment it excited at the time. But there are other grounds for objection. The manner is too flip, the joys of ridicule too freely indulged. Whatever Butler's limitations, he was a much more considerable figure than Muggeridge allows.

It was in *The Thirties*, as Ingrams says, that Muggeridge at last found his form as a writer. The book delivers a dismissive verdict on an entire decade: it is a tight-packed *sottisier*, a witty collage of errors and illusions—some sinister, most merely absurd. Read in small doses, it is highly entertaining, and it undoubtedly hits a good many nails on the head. But what does it finally amount to? Ingrams, echoing the review Orwell wrote in 1940, sums up its message as "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." Yes; except that it is really more like "Vanity of vanities, dear boy, all is vanity." The tone makes the music, and you can still hear the clubman's drawl—which is why the book palls if you try to read too much of it at once, and why Ingrams is shooting altogether too high when he talks of its "Gibbon-like detachment." You end up feeling that, for all its virtues, it isn't even quite true. You can get a more accurate picture of life in Britain at the time (or so I believe) in a roughly comparable work by Robert Graves and Alan Hodges, *The Long Weekend*.

There is a certain slackening of interest in the second half of Ingrams's book, though he gives a readable enough account of Muggeridge's wartime service in British intelligence (which was not without its comic-opera aspects), his years on the *Daily Telegraph*, of which he nearly became editor, and the manner in which he set about renovating *Punch*. He might perhaps have revealed more about his own role in the story: Muggeridge was one of the principal "godfathers" of *Private Eye*, the magazine that Ingrams used to edit. On the other hand we can be grateful, at a time when many biographers would have made a meal of them, that he doesn't dwell on Mug-

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geridge's energetic extramarital activities—though he can hardly avoid discussing the long affair with Pamela Berry, the wife of the owner of the *Daily Telegraph*, and he does tell us that in the 1950s and 1960s Muggeridge was known among colleagues at the BBC as "The Pouncer."

Muggeridge's journalistic output during his years of glory was prodigious. Far from slowing down, once he could afford to, he redoubled his efforts. The wonder is that he remained as compelling a performer as he did. When you saw something by him in a newspaper, it was what you tended to turn to first (albeit a bit guiltily). He could give even the most routine television appearance his special stamp. But in the end, inevitably, he started repeating himself. The instances Ingrams cites could easily be multiplied: every time he attacked D. H. Lawrence, for example, he seemed to trot out the same (admittedly ludicrous) passage from *Lady Chaterley's Lover*. And it wasn't only the overworked phrases and gambits that started jarring, but the whole image of the suave all-round iconoclast. By the 1970s, even admirers were growing tired of the celebrity who had achieved fame chiefly by means of bashing other celebrities, and who was now, especially in the two volumes of memoirs he published in 1972 and 1973, flinging around insults like confetti. Churchill was "vaguely obscene," the once-revered Gandhi was "crafty and calculating," T. S. Eliot was "somehow blighted, dead, extinct"—there was no reason why he couldn't have gone on like that forever.

Eventually, though, he grew tired himself. Cynicism wasn't enough; he edged his way back, very publicly, toward religion, campaigned against pornography and permissiveness, and assumed the new persona (it sometimes overlapped with his old one) of "St. Mugg." In 1982, a few months before his eightieth birthday, he and Kitty were received into the Catholic Church.

There was a great deal of scepticism about this final phase. You often heard, and quite often read, comments to the effect that he wasn't so much giving up sin as being given up by it; that he had only taken to denouncing the pleasures of the flesh when he could no longer enjoy them. Who can say? Personally, I don't think one should be in a hurry to pronounce on other people's sincerity in such matters. There might have been less incredulity, too, if more had been known about how strongly he had been drawn to religion in his twenties (something he kept oddly quiet about in his memoirs). What is true, however, is that his return to Christianity wasn't conducted in a manner particularly calculated to impress or inspire intelligent non-believers. It took place in the full glare of the media, with the result that it never quite threw off the air of being a performance.

How much will remain of his work? Journalists, and still more broadcasters, have to resign themselves to the fact that they deal in perishable goods. But something can sometimes be salvaged. It is entirely possible that one day an editor will judge it worth his while to assemble a Muggeridge anthology; and if old television programs ever achieve the permanence or seeming permanence of old movies, a few of his (especially the one he made when he went back to India in 1964) rank high among those that deserve to be rescued. But these are matters for speculation. The one thing beyond dispute is the lasting value of the example he set with his reporting from Russia. He rose to the challenge, at a time when there were powerful inducements not to, and for that, if there is any justice, he will always be honored.

O harp & altar

Henry Petroski
Engineers of Dreams: The Great Bridge Builders and the Spanning of America. Knopf, 479 pages, $30

reviewed by Francis Morrone

Structural engineers are a bit like surgeons. Their sometimes extraordinarily complex

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decisions are often all that stands between life and death. Like surgeons, they tend to be an egotistical lot, full of a sense of themselves as the ones who hold this world together. And, of course, they have a point. The calculations and instincts of the structural engineer, like those of the surgeon, do often measure the distance between well-being and disaster. "Bridges, like health," writes the engineer Henry Petroski, "are most appreciated when they begin to deteriorate and fail." Unlike doctors, however, builders tend not to arouse the admiration of society as a whole. Engineers of all kinds tend to be lumped into the pocket-protector class, and are never the subjects of popular fiction, as surgeons often are. Can one imagine a TV show like "E.R." centering on the lives and loves of engineers? Actually, I bet Henry Petroski can.

Every few years, along comes a particularly sensitive engineer who seeks to promote his profession to the cultural elite. In the 1980s we had Samuel Florman, one of whose tomes was entitled *The Existential Pleasures of Engineering*. In the 1990s, we have Henry Petroski, professor of civil engineering at Duke University, author of *To Engineer Is Human*, and more than a tad unlike most of the other Duke professors of our recent acquaintance. Petroski's mission seems to be twofold. First, he wishes, as in his books *The Pencil* and *The Evolution of Useful Things*, to imbue us with the wonder of the mundane, rather as though he were a late-twentieth-century Gerard Manley Hopkins. Second, he wishes, via the good graces of Alfred A. Knopf and *The New York Times Book Review*, to see to it that engineers are represented alongside Oliver Sacks and Stephen Jay Gould on the end tables of Gwathmeier houses in the eastern end of Long Island. And what better means has the chattering engineer to affect educated sensibilities than to mention art every three or four hundred words?

Professor Petroski's newest book is *Engineers of Dreams: Great Bridge Builders and the Spanning of America*. It is a marvelous read, filled both with strong narrative drama and fascinating and informative aperçus. It is, indeed, well-nigh unassailable as a responsible and engaging general survey of the history of American bridge building. Here are the great bridge builders whose names should be more familiar to the generally educated public: Othmar Hermann Ammann, engineer of New York's George Washington, Bronx-Whitestone, and Verrazano-Narrows bridges, and of San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge, considered by many the visually most exhilarating bridge in America; Gustav Lindenthal, engineer of the Manhattan, Queensboro, and Hell Gate bridges; David Steinman, engineer of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge and of the Mackinac Bridge; and James Buchanan Eads, an American Telford who spanned the Mississippi exactly two hundred years after Father Marquette first laid eyes on the mighty river.

That said, the thoughtful reader is bound to find that this book poses many more questions than it is within the purview of its author to attempt to answer, and that indeed the author himself in the very course of his effort to relate the romance of engineering seems wholly unprepared for some of the thickets into which he has strayed. I speak, of course, of Petroski's conflation of art and engineering, and, more broadly, of this notion that the honorific "art" is the ultimate token of esteem in our disintegrating culture. Petroski writes:

> The greatest bridges that engineers have built are clearly the ones that unite and achieve both structural and aesthetic goals, and often with striking strength and economy in their context. Above all, however, engineers know that, first and foremost, their bridges must stand into the future against weight and wind and want. The most beautiful bridge, when neglected in structural design and maintenance, can become, fallen, the most ugly pile of concrete and steel. That is not bridge building.

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Now, Petroski is a sane and deliberative man, and the passage just quoted may seem the statement of such a man. But it is freighted with presumptions. And needless to say these presumptions have nothing to do with engineering per se. They have rather to do with aesthetics.

This issue of aesthetics in relation to things like bridge building would lose all relevance were it not for our now customary predisposition to apply the sobriquet "art" to any and all of the manifestations of man's nominally expressive nature, whether they be the daubs of deaf children or the massive, concretized equations of engineers. Let me point out that I believe the appellation "artistic" in the writings of Henry Petroski to be an afterthought—an appliquéd embellishment of his obviously more heartfelt perorations on the intricacies of applied science. Still, the appellation dutifully appears and reappears throughout the discussion of bridge building, as though to leave art unmentioned would sully the seriousness of the project.

An important strand of modernist design theory, from its Victorian roots onward, attempted to blur the distinction between art and engineering. I believe—though this may not be the place to discuss it—that this particular conflation opened the floodgates to our present-day widespread insistence that all manner of political screed or perceptual experiment (however valid it may be in the strict context of its delimited purlieu) is somehow to be regarded, by the media, the universities, and government, as a work of art. Petroski self-consciously models his book to some extent on the wonderful *Lives of the Engineers* by the English historian of technology Samuel Smiles. Smiles's five-volume work was published by John Murray in 1904, and though strictly speaking it is of the Edwardian era, it nonetheless ranks as one of the monuments of Victorian consciousness. Now, Smiles could refer to the "art" of engineering, but when he did so he meant something a bit different from what we would mean today. "Art," for Smiles, bore a strictly Aristotelian resonance, and as such was distinct from *les beaux arts*. These two senses of art would never, in a consciousness such as that of Samuel Smiles, be taken to refer to the same thing. For contrast, listen to Le Corbusier on the subject of the George Washington Bridge: "When your car moves up the ramp the two towers rise so high that it brings you happiness; their structure is so pure, so resolute, so regular that here, finally, steel architecture seems to laugh." How Ruskin would have cringed at that sentence! Henry Petroski, though, does not cringe; and when he speaks of the art of bridge building he does so in such a way as to relegate aesthetics to a branch of endeavor which in its organized and formalized tenets and traditions is bound to appear quite meager beside science or engineering. And this is of course nonsense.

It is also sad, for Petroski is an honorable and responsible scholar whose forced forays in aesthetic delectation exhibit an amateurishness he would clearly disdain were the situation reversed, and the aesthetician presumed to comment upon an engineering science of which he had no knowledge.

For Petroski, the auteur of a bridge is its engineer, not its architect. It is, as he explains, often the case that a bridge's architect does not conceive the form of a bridge, but rather is brought in after the basic design has been done, and is charged with embellishing it or fussing it up. Sometimes the engineer takes it upon himself to do any residual fussing, as is famously the case with the Roeblings' Brooklyn Bridge with its spidery cables suspended from massive Gothic arches. The Gothic style is, of course, perfectly apposite in its use by the Roeblings, and indeed the Brooklyn Bridge is one of the most beguiling artifacts in America. Yet it can hardly be said, for example, to fit in with the Gothic Revival as propounded by such aesthetically ultra-sophisticated figures as Pugin, Viollet-le-Duc, and Ruskin. The aesthetic admiration of the Brooklyn Bridge, indeed of most modern bridges, is an admiration based not on what

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inheres in the work so much as on what is projected upon it. Our aesthetic admiration of the works of engineering, indeed, is not essentially different from our "aesthetic" experience of the "works" of nature. It is an ex post facto aestheticization. This is a defining issue of the modern consciousness, and is deeply rooted in Kant's and Schiller's categorical distinctions among the varieties of perceptual experience.

And because aesthetic appreciation of works of engineering is of this ex post facto variety, it is why works of engineering and technology have long been held up as the proudest achievements of American culture. They are, to use Philip Rahv's famous (and still useful) distinction, monuments of our "Redskin" culture, in contrast to the "Paleface" norms of European high culture. Or, in Kantian terms, it may be said that the "sublimity" of nature has been projected upon the works of men, in contrast to the "beauty" of classical tradition. It therefore comes as no surprise when a critic like George Steiner, in his notorious and profoundly silly screed "The Archives of Eden," posits that the only real contributions America has made to Western culture are in the field of engineering.

It is also not surprising, though it is dismaying, that the only beauty which seems to move Henry Petroski when he views our nation's glorious bridges is the beauty of pure engineering form. How else to explain that he can expend twenty-six pages on the Manhattan Bridge yet fail even once to mention the great New York architects John Carrere and Thomas Hastings? Or to comment upon the vogue of Viollet-le-Duc which so manifestly influenced the design of that magnificent bridge? Petroski does not tell us that the considerable aesthetic frisson of the Queensboro Bridge owes as much to its gifted architect, Henry Hornbostel, as to its engineer, Lindenthal. And we are not sufficiently informed that the Golden Gate Bridge—the equal of the Chrysler Building as an icon of the interwar years in America—is, in its appeal to those who view and use it, as much the work of its gifted architect, Irving Morrow, as of its engineer, Ammann. The point is, where our bridges do thrill as pure works of engineering, then this should be stated; and where our bridges thrill with their architectural qualities, this should be stated. For we are a nation of both Redskins and Palefaces, and at this late date it simply does not do to suggest otherwise.

Required reading?

Martha C. Nussbaum
Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life.
Beacon Press, 143 pages, $20

reviewed by Daniel J. Silver

Like Bill Clinton, Martha Nussbaum wants you to know that she feels your pain. She wants us all to feel each other's pain and thinks that this will lead to better social policy, better laws, and better legal judgments. That is the burden of argument, such as it is, in *Poetic Justice*, a reworking of lectures Nussbaum has given at various law schools, including the University of Chicago Law School, where she is now a professor of law and ethics. The ostensible subject is how our appreciation for literary art—particularly our attentive reading of novels—can enrich legal reasoning. It sounds on the face of it innocuous enough. But the underlying agenda proves to be a standard liberal argument for social redistribution; this is said to be a moral imperative, our adoption of which, she tells us, will naturally arise out of our learning to be better literary critics. The supporting arguments are, in fact, astoundingly slipshod for a thinker who has been so routinely lionized. The book is, finally, another telling instance of the sad decline of academic disciplines: Nussbaum and her university sponsors traduce at once philosophy, literary criticism, and law in the unending effort to enforce political correctness.

Both a classicist and philosopher by

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training, Nussbaum, who is described by a fellow professor on the book's dust jacket as "one of our nation's most important public intellectuals," began her illustrious career with a well-regarded translation of a difficult text by Aristotle. She has continued to claim Aristotle as her prime philosophical mentor, particularly in offering a corrective to Platonic idealism and absolutism. If Plato appeals to an ultimate sphere of judgment in a transcendental realm of pure universals, for Nussbaum, Aristotle's more nominalistic world view accommodates itself much better to the slippery, muddier world of the merely human, and is for this reason more attractive.

Eventually, Nussbaum became disenchanted with studying only the "official" philosophical corpus, and turned her attention to the even more openly human realm of literature. She became interested in what lessons Greek tragedy had for the philosophers, feeling that there were aspects of the tragic vision—especially the lesson of human limitations and the exigency of human circumstances—that were not sufficiently respected or considered among the Socratic circle and its epigones. Plato threw poets (most of them, anyway) out of his republic; Nussbaum became their advocate, insisting that they should be brought back into the public debate on what kinds of lives we should live.

Exemplifying an unwelcome academic trend—which makes all too vulgarly literal the notion of a marketplace of ideas—Nussbaum has moved on from her mere professorship in classics and philosophy at Brown University to become a professor of law at one of America's top law schools—though she has never studied law. Her fellow academic superstar, Stanley Fish, who provides a blurb for the dust jacket ("Martha Nussbaum's new book should be required reading for every member of Congress"), also without benefit of any legal training, preceded her by becoming a professor of law and literature at Duke. "Interdisciplinary" studies are all the rage, and somehow law schools have convinced themselves that it is worth paying doubtless large salaries to these academic trailblazers, who can bring budding lawyers up to date with the latest humanistic "learning." And what, precisely, is the learning she has to impart?

Nussbaum's thesis can be summed up fairly easily. Learning to read novels with some attention involves learning to appreciate the way novels particularize human circumstances, allowing us empathetic access to individual experience, with its richly concrete specificity, as opposed to the bland generalities we all too easily summon up when thinking about humanity in the mass. When we think about individual persons in this way, with their tangled roots in the world and their complicated histories, we will be less likely to find appealing any model of human conduct, as a guide for social policy or legal judgment, that is abstract and one-dimensional, and that ignores the power of circumstances in conditioning behavior.

These latter, bad characteristics are typical of the bête noire Nussbaum sees gobbling up the legal and policy scene: the law-and-economics movement, which tries to translate all legal issues into a rational calculus of benefit and risk. This economic model is grounded in a utilitarian model of justice—construing justice as maximizing societal welfare—and a rationalist account of human motivation. According to Nussbaum, no one who reads novels in the right way would be tempted to accept the economist's premise that human beings are essentially profit-maximizing creatures who try, so far as they are aware, to act in rational self-interest. For Nussbaum, this is a perniciously reductionist account of the human condition which leads to bad policies and judgments.

To illustrate the ethical and legal importance of reading novels, Nussbaum picks three of the most tendentious novels in English, novels expressly written in a rhetorical mode to prove underlying political points: Dickens's attack on utilitarian social

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thought in *Hard Times*, Richard Wright's indictment of a racist America in *Native Son*, and E. M. Forster's posthumously exhumed paean to the gay life, *Maurice*. Nussbaum's idea of "critical" reading is to follow in lock step the agenda set forth in these books; the only time she asks us to back away is with regard to Dickens's surely wrong-headed view that working people are not always miserable and the equally obtuse view that labor unions do not always serve workers well. But Nussbaum charitably regards these reactionary tics as negligible distractions from Dickens's otherwise perfectly credible caricatures of both utilitarianism and capitalism. So, too, Wright's insistence that we see Bigger Thomas's act of killing as the inevitable by-product of his victimization by a racist society, and Forster's punishing of his closeted character for playing "straight" and failing to embrace a liberated life go completely without challenge. What is important to Nussbaum is, rather, the way these novelists compel us to enter into the experience of their characters, who are stuck in various situations that have impoverished their lives.

Generalizing about the vicarious experience of the novel-reader, and borrowing an expression from Adam Smith, Nussbaum sees the good reader as a "judicious spectator": someone who is not disengaged or unemotional but who combines critical distance with empathetic understanding so as to imagine most fully characters' situations. In this way, Nussbaum claims, the judicious reader of realist novels comes to appreciate what it means to be disadvantaged:

> The reader participates vicariously in numerous different lives, some more advantaged and some less. In realist social novels . . . these lives are self-consciously drawn from different social strata, and the extent to which these varied circumstances allow for flourishing is made part of the reader's experience. The reader enters each of these lives not knowing, so to speak, which one of them is hers . . . living each of those lives in turn and becoming aware that her actual place is in many respects an accident of fortune. . . . This means . . . that she will notice especially vividly the disadvantages faced by the least well off.

As an empirical description of readers' experiences, this generalization strikes me as being entirely without foundation. More significant here, however, is Nussbaum's attempt to stage-manage the transformation of this descriptive model into a normative model of justice. In effect, the reading experience is turned into a vicarious enactment of the thought experiment that John Rawls employed in his book *A Theory of Justice*, a work whose world view is at the base of Nussbaum's kind of liberalism.

Rawls asks us to imagine strangers in a strange land thrown together, ignorant both of each other's capacities and of the potential riches of their brave new world. Thus, these individuals are shorn of the historical *donnée* with which we normally imagine lives; they are, as Nussbaum would put it, free of the accidental and contingent nature of our circumstances in life. Rawls asks, what rule would these strangers choose for distributing most fairly whatever goods they come upon; and his answer is this: no one is to be allowed to be better off unless the least well off are also improved in their circumstances.

Rawls reasons that once we are stripped of our own advantages we would opt for a rule that we would want to have applied if we were to find ourselves on the bottom rung, and that is to ensure that the lowest be lifted up with every expenditure of social resources. This is what Nussbaum is getting at when she emphasizes at the end of the passage quoted above that the reader will "notice especially vividly the disadvantages faced by the least well off." The judicious spectator would always, she argues in effect, put in place the Rawlsian rule of distributive (actually, redistributive) justice.

This works out conveniently, of course, with the novels she chooses, since they all

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actively direct our attention to the "victims" of life's unfairness. She seems, nonetheless, generally confident that her audience will draw the same conclusions without either her or an author's active prodding.

Is it too much to suppose that such confidence stems from the high-minded prejudices of a Martha Craven Nussbaum, of Brown and Chicago, award-winning academic, panelist on international committees for various sorts of do-good projects, a one-time Bill Moyers "profile-in-ideas" subject—in short, someone not far from the top of the heap? It is sometimes a difficult and bitter lesson for such persons that tolerance is a luxury that few can so easily afford as they.

It doesn't take many alternative thought experiments to realize how blinkered is Nussbaum's frame of reference; not everyone will be disposed to see her own favorite kinds of victim in the same way. For instance, let us take Nussbaum's assumption that her model of the "judicious spectator" is that of the ideal juror, who will empathetically—though, to be sure, with calm deliberation—consider the circumstances of the downtrodden before passing judgment. We may wonder, then, what she would say about the Simi Valley jurors who acquitted of serious charges the police officers who beat Rodney King. Was their failure to feel sufficiently the victim's pain an example of poor "reading," or moral obtuseness, or perhaps of lessons drawn from life experiences with which a Martha Nussbaum might find it difficult herself to empathize?

Nussbaum is terribly concerned to ensure that criminal defendants be afforded every last consideration; she seems to agree with Richard Wright that to judge why Bigger kills would require an explanation of his whole life. From the tenor of her comments, one may suspect that she might be rather less enthusiastic about such devices of eliciting empathy as "victim impact statements," which try to bring home to jurors or judges the pain and suffering caused by loss of loved ones. If she has faith in her procedural model of judicious spectatorship, she would be better off untethering its examples from her own substantive political commitments.

But one senses that that would be beside the point. Nussbaum engages in a form of theoretical obscurantism, disguising behind a description of methods a political agenda, to ensure our embrace of the ideal of social redistribution. To be sure, the disguise is thin, which may only go to show that political correctness is so broadly accepted as a normative ideal in the academy that Nussbaum need hardly pretend otherwise; the political nature of her arguments is simply assumed.

One can readily agree with her that the quantitative measure of human values indulged in by economic rationalists may be pernicious, without accepting her unwarranted leap to her own forms of social engineering. And while we all would like to think that the humane intelligence embodied in the best novels can provide useful moral knowledge in the world, it is not easy to make these translations. The best thing to be said about Nussbaum is that unlike her peer, Stanley Fish, who is a professional cynic, she is morally serious. But she shares a problem with many liberals, which it is not unfair to describe as a kind of arrogance, in failing to understand the motivations of those who aren't as right-thinking. Would that she, as a "public intellectual," began to think harder about who the public is she means to serve.

Diluting Edwards

Joseph A. Conforti
Jonathan Edwards, Religious Tradition, and American Culture.
The University of North Carolina Press, 267 pages, $29.95

reviewed by Marc M. Arkin

On July 1, 1750, the Rev. Jonathan Edwards preached his farewell sermon to the congregational church in Northampton, Mas-

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sachusetts, which he had served for twenty-three years, almost all of his adult life. It was barely ten days after a bitter church meeting elected by one vote to dismiss him, ignoring his offer to resign. Edwards had already alienated the congregation when he proposed to discipline the children of some prominent families for circulating a "bad book," a midwives' manual. The final die was cast when he insisted that congregants demonstrate a saving work of God in their own souls in order to partake of the Lord's Supper, a practice long since abandoned by the previous minister, Edwards's own grandfather. Forgotten in the dispute were the repeated seasons of religious awakening that had graced the church under Edwards's pastorate.

At forty-six, Jonathan Edwards would never have another congregation. Instead, the man who would one day be viewed as the greatest American religious thinker—and one of the foremost American philosophers—found himself stranded with a wife and seven dependent children. After almost a year of soldiering on in Northampton, rescue came in the form of a call to Stockbridge, Massachusetts, a tiny frontier outpost where the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England and the Bay Colony's Board of Commissioners for Indian Affairs maintained a struggling mission to the Housatonics.

And yet, the ensuing eight years of exile were productive ones. In between running a boarding school for Indian boys, preaching to his Housatonic charges through an interpreter, dodging the hostilities of the French and Indian War, and facing the opposition of a land-speculating relative who had already settled in Stockbridge, Edwards published the works familiarly known as *Freedom of the Will* (1754) and *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended* (1758). He also prepared the manuscript of *The Nature of True Virtue* (1755, first published 1765) and began his epic narrative, *A History of the Work of Redemption*. This extraordinary outpouring ended only with an offer to assume the presidency of the College of New Jersey (predecessor of Princeton University), where Edwards died after less than two months in office.

Born into the first ranks of the New England clerical elite, Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) was raised in East Windsor, Connecticut, in the shadow of his father's church, and attended Yale College, then the most evangelically-inclined school in the colonies. Following a brief pastorate in New York and an appointment as academic tutor at Yale, Edwards was ordained associate pastor of his eighty-four-year-old grandfather's Northampton church in 1727. Two years later, on his grandfather's death, Edwards became pastor, acceding to one of the most prestigious pulpits in New England at the ripe age of twenty-four. Within a few years, in the mid-1730s, he led a series of revivals in Northampton and the other towns of the Connecticut River Valley that was the precursor of a wider colonial religious movement known as the "Great Awakening." But, by 1743, the religious fervor had waned, leaving Edwards to analyze the awakening in *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* (1746)—and to develop the scruples that would ultimately end his ministry.

Despite this outwardly conventional career, Edwards was nothing if not a complex figure. A strict Calvinist whose theological works found favor with those strictest of Calvinists, the Scottish Presbyterians, Edwards waxed rhapsodic about the inward sweetness of his religious experience. A successful revival preacher, he is traditionally known for delivering closely-reasoned sermons in a deadly monotone. A man who spent his time scanning the newspapers for signs of the imminent apocalypse, he died from a botched smallpox vaccination, when vaccination was still an experimental medical procedure.

It is the thesis of Joseph A. Conforti's stimulating revisionist study of the Edwardsian tradition that there is more complexity still: the heroic Jonathan Edwards is a creation, not of his own day, but, rather,

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of the "Second Great Awakening," a religious revival that began almost fifty years after Edwards's death and persisted until about 1840. What is more, following the lead of current revisionist scholarship, Professor Conforti minimizes the importance of the colonial awakening itself, contending that it was neither great, nor general, nor much of an awakening.

Instead, Professor Conforti, director of the American and New England studies program at the University of Southern Maine, argues that the clerical leadership of the second revival "reinvented" Edwards—and the colonial revival—turning him into the founder of Protestant America's emerging evangelical culture of revivalism, sentimental piety, and social reform. In doing so, his successors shaped Edwards to meet their needs. They pointed to Edwards's restraint as a counterweight to the unbridled excesses of the religious awakening on the western frontier. More important, they downplayed Edwards's ardent Calvinism, including his emphasis on the absolute sovereignty of God and his belief in the freedom of the will under the determining moral constraint of original sin. Instead, they focused on his works of practical divinity and personal piety, works in which Edwards placed the wellspring of true religion in the lively inclinations that determine the heart and its outward expression in disinterested benevolence.

Professor Conforti further describes a vital and persistent Edwardsian theological tradition which traced its roots both literally and figuratively to the Edwards parsonage and remained active through the Civil War. Among the laity, the tradition was exemplified by the hothouse religious atmosphere fostered by Mary Lyon (1797–1841) at Mount Holyoke College, where, according to Conforti, the school's culture revolved around an obsessive version of the Edwardsian doctrine of disinterested benevolence. Among the clergy, Professor Conforti finds the most powerful interpreter of this tradition in Edwards Amasa Park (1808–1900), Abbot Professor of Divinity (1847–1881) at Andover Theological Seminary. (And yes, not only was Park named after Edwards, but he married Edwards's great-granddaughter and eventually acquired the Edwards papers from family sources.) Park transformed the works of the first generation of Edwards's followers—the so-called "New Divinity" men, including Samuel Hopkins and Joseph Bellamy, both of whom had studied with Edwards—into the New England Theology by claiming a direct "genetic" descent from Edwards himself. At the same time, Parks personally attempted to synthesize a Consistent Calvinism that would reconcile divine sovereignty with freedom of the will, while freeing old-style Calvinism of its "wens."

Professor Conforti finds yet another renovation of the Edwards image in the late nineteenth century with the "colonial revival": the general resurgence of interest in the nation's founders in reaction to the pressures of immigration and industrialization. New England antiquarians turned Edwards into a figure of stern Anglo-Saxon Puritan virtue, while concurrently, in the academy, his mystical accounts of the beauty of religious experience transformed him into the direct ancestor of the New England renaissance in American literature. Edwards monuments began to dot the landscape and clutter the bookshelf.

The most controversial—and, consequently, the most interesting—aspect of the book is Professor Conforti's claim that Edwards's reputation is an artifact of the nineteenth century. As evidence for Edwards's narrow successes in his own day, Conforti points to a remarkable, and rarely remarked upon fact: Edwards's writings enjoyed very limited publication until the nineteenth century and many of his works were first printed abroad and enjoyed greater circulation there than in America. For example, although Edwards died in 1757, there was no complete American edition of his works until 1808, more than fifty years later. In 1765, Samuel Hopkins was forced to abandon his plans for such a collection due to lack of

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public interest. When Edwards died, his son, Jonathan Edwards, Jr., could not find an American publisher for *A History of the Work of Redemption*; rather, he had to turn to Scotland, where the book was first published in 1774.

By contrast, in the 1830s, students and faculty withdrew Edwards's *Works* from the Yale library at almost twice the rate of the next most frequently circulated volume. Simplified versions of Edwards's works were among the most popular books in the American Tract Society's catalogue of religious writings. The previously ignored *History of the Work of Redemption* was a virtual best seller after 1838, when it became part of the Tract Society's Evangelical Family Library. And, Edwards's hagiographic *Life of David Brainerd* (1749), the tale of a hapless young man who died in the course of a hopelessly unsuccessful career as a missionary to the Indians, went through repeated editions. It remained on the Tract Society list until 1892, and spawned a cult of pilgrimage to Brainerd's grave.

Now, in its broad outlines, Conforti's is a most interesting and thought-provoking thesis. As with so many other things, however, the devil is in the details. It is, for example, rather difficult to square Conforti's description of a man whose death was noted by "only a few obituaries" that suggested "no great outpouring of grief" with the Edwards who was called from "frontier exile" to the presidency of Princeton and who had, in palmier days, been the commencement speaker at Yale. Indeed, both the very fact that Edwards was among the few American intellectuals whose works were widely circulated abroad during the eighteenth century and the persistence of an Edwardsian theology undercut Conforti's argument.

What is more, the claim that Edwards was a less than dominant figure during his own lifetime is unnecessary to Conforti's other claim—that the Second Great Awakening rediscovered him. It is equally—if not more—plausible that the eclipse of popular interest in Edwards after his death is attributable to the wider secularization of culture in the decade preceding the Revolution and during the early national period, a secularization that was countered only by the Second Great Awakening. Professor Conforti's observations serve to underscore the profound cultural *volte face* at the turn of the century.

For that matter, revisionism is all well and good, but it is important not to mistake the baby for the bathwater. To those of us raised on the Great Awakening—including the triumphant tours of George Whitefield, the Billy Graham of his day, from Georgia to New England—Conforti's suggestion that the colonial revival was ginned up by nineteenth-century evangelical historians seems a bit much. Previous accounts may have overstated the importance of the colonial awakening, hoping to find in it the seeds of a national consciousness that would eventually lead to the Revolution. I think it is fair to say, though, that something deeply significant of a religious nature happened in the colonies between 1734 and 1743 and that Jonathan Edwards was prominently involved in whatever that was.

But even Professor Conforti's account of a continuing and vital Edwardsian tradition during the antebellum period raises some questions. First of all, it tends to overlook other major contributors to the antebellum cultural mix, particularly those associated with Yale and the increasingly liberal, revival-oriented theology of Nathaniel William Taylor, Lyman Beecher, and Timothy Dwight, president of Yale and Edwards's grandson. But, even on its own terms, the account remains less than fully convincing.

The received interpretation, strongly influenced by twentieth-century neo-orthodoxy, is that the New Divinity represented a decline from the tragic vision inherent in Edwards's strict Calvinism to a watered-down moralism that verged on obscurantism in its attempt to preserve the Edwards legacy while purging it of doctrines, such as imputation, that were becoming increasingly unpalatable. In reaction, recent schol-

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ars have argued that the New Divinity theologians remained true Calvinists and loyal Edwardsians despite their modification of key doctrines. Professor Conforti presents a third path, choosing to revise the revisionists: he emphasizes the doctrinal innovations of the New England Theology even while claiming that the Edwardsian tradition remained vital throughout the antebellum period. This, of course, brings us to the nub: when does Edwardsianism become so diluted that it no longer has anything to do with Edwards?

Conforti attempts to strengthen his claim for the continuity of the Edwardsian tradition by remaking Edwards into the nineteenth century's image of him. Thus, in his discussion of Mary Lyon's lay revivalism, Conforti seems to give Edwards credit for being a nineteenth-century evangelist, given to such "new measures" as the "anxious bench" and protracted prayer meetings in order to bring about conversion experiences among the hopeful. Although Puritans had a long tradition of making use of the means of grace—prayer, self-examination, reading the scripture, and church attendance—it was not until the advent of Charles Grandison Finney, the greatest evangelist of the antebellum period, that revivalism became an institutionalized science and not a "suprising work of God."

Although this book is likely to engage the specialist even while generating objections, it may have a more limited appeal to the ordinary reader—after all, in order to appreciate revisionism, you have to know what is being revised. At times, in fact, the enterprise does put one in mind of the old saw about scholars taking in one another's washing. As a more general matter, the book bears the marks of being an expanded set of monographs, most of which first appeared in specialized journals. Thus, on the one hand, it assumes a fair amount of what a lay reader might—with some justification—consider rather obscure knowledge regarding the New Divinity and, on the other, it is repetitive to the point of distraction. Buzz words such as "cultural icon" and "reify" appear with grating regularity, substituting for deeper analysis.

Part of the difficulty, I think, is that the author cannot decide whether he is in sympathy with Edwards or not. This leads him to focus on the weakened reflection of Edwards in the thought of others and to avoid the question of *why* Edwards has retained so much symbolic power for our culture. Perhaps it is the genuine grandeur of Edwards's vision that filters through, becoming all things to all men that he might by all means save some.

Democracy vs. the news

James Fallows
Breaking the News: How the Media Undermine American Democracy.
Pantheon, 296 pages, $23

reviewed by Philip Terzian

Breaking the News is a book that could only have been written in the late twentieth century by someone born about the middle of the century. It is impossible to imagine an Enlightenment pamphleteer, or Victorian inhabitant of Grub Street, or foreign correspondent in Weimar Berlin, wasting a hapless grove of trees to speculate whether his chosen vocation was somehow to blame for affairs of state. But then there has been nothing quite like the Baby Boom generation for sheer self-regard and self-veneration, or for journalists who might suppose that, among the remarkable achievements of their peers, "the media" could "undermine American democracy." Journalists of the past, even the recent past, would have laughed at such conceit: democracy, they would argue, might well undermine the media—journalism is a business, subject to the marketplace—but not the other way around.

It is a paradox of the modern journalistic world that, as the number of newspapers in America steadily diminishes, the number of

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studies devoted to the press, the number of symposia planned to discuss it, the number of books on the subject and public philosophers to write them, somehow rises. But there is a simple explanation, really. Journalism, like any number of occupations, has undergone status inflation in our times. What was once a slightly disreputable trade—complete with apprenticeships, journeymen, and guilds—is now a profession, one which attracts the likes of our author, James Fallows.

Mr. Fallows, a graduate of Harvard College who once wrote speeches for President Jimmy Carter, has done quite well in a business which, just a generation ago, would not have attracted many Harvard men. This elevated station, however, exacts a price: journalists, especially journalists of Mr. Fallows's generation, tend to enlarge the significance of their work by assuming an importance it does not possess. And, being Baby Boomers, there is never enough time and space for self-analysis.

Here, then, is Mr. Fallows's contribution to the mayhem. American journalism and democracy are in crisis, he believes, because the media have grown more powerful than in the past and, inevitably, corrupt and irresponsible. Americans have never been especially fond of the press, he acknowledges, but "through the last decade . . . their disdain . . . has reached new levels. Americans believe that the news media have become too arrogant, cynical, scandal-minded, and destructive."

This has had two unfortunate consequences. The public has registered its dismay by gradually boycotting the press, reducing the number of outlets and resources. Accordingly, democracy has suffered, in Mr. Fallows's estimation, because "ignoring the news leaves people with no way to prepare for trends they don't happen to observe themselves, no sense of what is happening in other countries or even other parts of their own town, no tools with which to make decisions about public leaders or policies." Mr. Fallows's explanation for all this—journalists are too cynical—is familiar to any viewer of TV chat shows or reader of Op-Ed pages where, since the inauguration of President Bill Clinton, any number of journalists have reached a similar conclusion, and are troubled in that knowledge. We will return to this in a moment. In the meantime, however, it is worth examining Mr. Fallows's initial thesis.

The powers of the press, whatever they may be, are subjective, even haphazard, in nature. Newspapers may amplify or mitigate stories, as they choose, and exalt or belittle individuals. But there is no clear relationship between the actions of the media and their discernible effects. One obvious illustration is in presidential politics: in the 1930s and 1940s, when most American newspapers were editorially opposed to the New Deal, Franklin D. Roosevelt was four times elected to the presidency. By the 1980s, when most American newspapers were editorially transformed, Ronald Reagan was elected to two terms. Indeed, from a progressive viewpoint, no amount of propaganda in the news pages or on the air about a variety of issues—homelessness, affirmative action, anti-Communism, crime—has yielded the desired results in public opinion. Still, like advertising, journalism seems to possess implicit power: it cannot be quantified, yet is somehow presumed. The fact that candidates for public office, and politicians in power, contend with the media, even a hostile press, is testament to this power. They would happily do otherwise if they felt they could.

Still, it is difficult to ascribe much power, especially the power to undermine democracy, to an institution which, as Mr. Fallows suggests, is steadily shrinking in public esteem. Here, then, a little textual critique might yield more evidence than investigative reporting. Mr. Fallows's lament for the gradual irrelevance of the media to national life is expressed in extraordinary terms. Without the benefit of the press, he says, the citizenry is very nearly helpless: people cannot know anything, and knowing nothing, cannot make informed judgments—

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not even about events in "other parts of their own town," much less "other countries."

Only a journalist born into the television age, and raised to believe that the medium is the message, could believe such a thing, or assert it without discerning its clear implication. The media, after all, is a recent invention. Mass circulation newspapers did not exist before the twentieth century, and "broadcast journalism"—an oxymoron, if ever there was one—is a postwar phenomenon. It is difficult to imagine, from Mr. Fallows's point of view, how the colonists of the Massachusetts Bay, or the westward migrants of the Cumberland Gap, or the industrial classes of the Gilded Age, might have prepared "for trends they don't happen to observe" in the absence of "tools with which to make decisions." Of course, the press is a factor in a prosperous democracy, but it is scarcely a decisive one.

That is the essential difference between journalism as it used to be practiced, and journalism as it appears to subsist today. It is only in very recent times that the writers and editors of newspapers presumed that they perform something approaching a public service, or must feel the need to discharge a civic duty. Historically, journalism was a kind of low literary art: most towns and cities had multiple outlets, all pursuing a cacophony of styles and ideology. Readers were invited to make a choice—the penny press for the working man, the *Boston Evening Transcript* for T. S. Eliot's Cousin Harriet—and newspapers catered to their customers' taste.

Unhappily, this tradition has largely been lost. Cities and towns, even vast metropolitan regions, are often served by one daily newspaper; and newspapers, including their proprietors, tend to picture themselves now as a community resource, a local, quasi-governmental institution. This has led, in contemporary America, down some very predictable paths. Not only do newspapers, and "media outlets" generally, seek to cater to an unseen, polyglot audience, but they do so by imitating the most egregious excesses of political indoctrination. Journalists do not seek truth, as a rule, since truth, in our postmodern world, is a matter of opinion. They scarcely even bother to record the passing circus. They pursue justice, instead, or correct imbalance, or foment "change," or cater to fashionable prejudice or mythology. They serve, on the whole, to satisfy themselves. Journalists tend to address one another in print, rather than the customers purchasing their product, since subscribers must be guided to "prepare for trends they don't happen to observe themselves."

For Mr. Fallows, cynicism is the perverse element in modern journalism, along with arrogance and (in some instances) undue affluence. But cynicism is scarcely the besetting sin of the trade; in truth, journalists are not cynical, but impossibly romantic. They become infatuated with personalities, they evolve (with much encouragement) into political crusaders, they insinuate their values into their reporting, and do it so habitually that their partisan convictions are often mistaken for the canons of the press. Indeed, they can be cynical, but about their readers, not their subjects.

Mr. Fallows is no exception. It is strikingly evident, in *Breaking the News*, that it is not American democracy for which he despairs, but the Democratic party. And like any good reporter, he furnishes his readers with instructive examples. The occasional success of Republicans in politics is so painfully mysterious it can only be explained by media misadventure. The loss of Democratic hegemony can largely be ascribed to a derelict press. All of Mr. Fallows's gallant losers are Democrats, all his villainous conquerors are Republicans (or worse, conservatives) and his thoughtful acquaintances are safely on the Left, all duly applauded in the back of the book. Mr. Fallows expends considerable energy, and much valuable space, to defend the policy initiatives of Bill Clinton, and Fallows's old boss Jimmy Carter, against a catalogue of supposed distortions in the media and professional

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malpractice. How, he asks, can decency be restored to public discourse, and the good works of Carter and Clinton be acknowledged? No wonder, one is tempted to think, that the people who used to read newspapers on the subway now listen to Rush Limbaugh.

Mr. Fallows is certainly correct to deplore many of the habits of political reporting, and much of its superficiality and sloth. In presidential campaigns, as we may observe this year, journalists are more interested in process than substance, and tend to follow contests rather than the principles presumably at stake. Moreover, television has corrupted the routine—a corruption, I should say, embraced by all participants—by reducing details to digestible chunks, or emphasizing trivia: pouncing on mistakes, probing for weakness, judging politicians on theatrical grounds.

But it is a mistake to suppose that Americans are so malleable. The prettiest candidates do not always win, the richest often lose, and the cleverest slogans don't always prevail. The Clinton health care plan was not scuttled by irresponsible journalism (as Mr. Fallows believes) but by discussion of the issue, in Congress and out, and by public debate, a democratic clash of ideals and opinions. President Clinton and James Fallows lost a fair fight.

For that matter, it is ignorant to presume that the Barnumesque qualities of American public life may be blamed on supposed transgressions of the media. James Fallows, and too many of his colleagues, persistently allude to some distant golden age of participatory democracy, a kind of civic Eden from which our national politics, having savored the taste of sound-bitten apples, are forever expelled. When was it? There was no television or *USA Today* when "Tippecanoe and Tyler too" were running for the White House, or "a chicken in every pot" was promised to Americans: "Let us have peace," "He kept us out of war," "Happy days are here again," "I shall go to Korea"—it is not so easy to conclude that things are worse.

Will Barnet

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And unfortunately, the cure is more dangerous than the disease. A healthy portion of this volume is devoted to a particular enthusiasm of Mr. Fallows's called "Public Journalism," a curious movement within the business, well funded by foundations and supported by practitioners, which maintains that publications ought to be good corporate citizens, and promote specific political goals. The notion of Public Journalism appears to have originated with Charles Peters, proprietor of *The Washington Monthly* and an early patron of James Fallows, who offers his mentor much reverential treatment in this work. Peters is a former Peace Corps bureaucrat who has sought for decades to translate the culture of his onetime employer into political journalism: an upside-down version of paternalism, where bright young things (like James Fallows) spread out into the provinces and educate those with "no sense of what is happening in other countries or even other parts of their own town."

If Mr. Fallows thinks that the public is unhappy with the media now, and believes that journalists are partisan and arrogant, he should wait until the full horror of Public Journalism takes root in American newspapers and on the television networks. Charles Peters has lately been revealed to be a private political adviser to the Democratic governor of West Virginia. Perhaps, with luck, all Americans will benefit from the luxury of Democratic government, West Virginia-style, blessed by the wisdom of Charles Peters, and guided by the judgment of journalists like James Fallows, rescuing the American people from themselves.

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Notebook

The canonization of W. E. B. Du Bois

by Daniel J. Flynn

The reputation of the black writer and activist W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963) has recently undergone an enormous resurgence. In his 1994 Pulitzer-Prize-winning biography, *W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race*, David Levering Lewis celebrated Du Bois as the "primary architect of the civil rights movement." The U.S. Postal Service paid homage to Harvard's first black Ph.D. by placing his visage on a commemorative stamp. Within the next year, PBS will broadcast two sympathetic documentaries chronicling his life. And on the college lecture circuit, whether the speaker is Jesse Jackson or Dinesh D'Souza, Du Bois is one of today's most quotable figures.

Last month, seeking to elevate Du Bois onto an even higher plane, the University of Massachusetts in Amherst officially named its library in his honor. The tower library is the tallest building on campus and, at twenty-six stories, is among the tallest public buildings in the Bay State. A son of nearby Great Barrington, Du Bois's papers are housed in the structure which, campus activists reason, makes him an appropriate choice for the dedication.

One of the founders of the NAACP, Du Bois has been packaged on the campus as a civil rights pioneer, or given the more ambiguous label "social justice advocate." Subscribing to this school of thought, University of Massachusetts Chancellor David Scott praises Du Bois for having "worked tirelessly to end racial discrimination" while the school's recently departed president, Michael Hooker, hails him as an activist on "behalf of freedom, justice, peace and racial equality."

The truth about Du Bois, however, is not so attractive. In 1903, this crusader for "freedom, justice, peace and racial equality" labeled Jews "shrewd and unscrupulous foreigners" who were the "heir of the slave-baron." Almost a half-century later he apocalyptically predicted that "the vast majority of mankind will march on and over [the white race]." Why a university president would associate Du Bois with "freedom, justice, peace and racial equality" is puzzling, to say the least.

Although at times Du Bois did call for integration, he more often advanced racial separatism, making him an early version of today's radical multiculturalists, not the ideological forerunner of Martin Luther King, Jr. The father of Pan-Africanism, Du Bois made his first of many calls to "absolutely segregate the races" in the January 1920 issue of *Crisis*, the magazine for which he served as editor. Writing in the same magazine thirteen years later, Du Bois called for a "plan" to involve "increased segregation and perhaps migration" for American blacks. By 1948, his incessant calls to separate the races so infuriated the NAACP leadership that he was kicked out of the organization he helped found. In 1961, two years before his death, Du Bois took the ex-

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treme measure of renouncing his U.S. citizenship and emigrating to Kwame Nkrumah's Ghana.

A belief in segregation as a panacea for race prejudice is but one of many convictions shared by Du Bois and his multiculturalist progeny in contemporary academia. An apostle of Josef Stalin, Mao Tse-tung, and Gus Hall, Du Bois saw capitalism as "doomed to self-destruction" whereas he extolled Communism as "the only way of human life." While his Marxism was deeply linked to a disdain for America and its mistreatment of its black citizens, Du Bois did not drift into Communism solely because of its scathing critique of the United States. He was a true believer. But because of the racial prejudice of many of his Communist comrades, Du Bois did not find a home in the movement until the second half of his life.

Unlike a great many of his contemporaries caught up in Leftist causes, Du Bois could not be accused of being a misguided progressive, unaware of the real goings-on behind the Iron Curtain. Traveling to the Communist world on dozens of occasions, including four trips to the Soviet Union, Du Bois eulogized Josef Stalin as a "great" and "courageous" man, who was "attacked and slandered as few men of power have been." In Mao Tse-tung, he saw a man leading a nation by example, with China now having "a sense of human nature free of its most hurtful and terrible meanness."

Perhaps most indicative of Du Bois's hard-line outlook was his judgment about the crackdown on religion behind the Iron Curtain, which he saw as "the Russian Revolution's greatest gift to the modern world." Writing in his autobiography, which was published in America five years after his passing, Du Bois argued that

> many folk follow religious ceremonies and services and allow their children to learn fairy tales and so-called religious truth, which in time the children come to recognize as conventional lies told by their parents and teachers for the children's good. One can hardly exaggerate the moral disaster of this custom. We have to thank the Soviet Union for the courage to stop it.

Hardly what one would expect from the man the academic Left currently holds up as a paragon of tolerance and progressive thought.

Du Bois's service in the Communist cause did not go unnoticed. In appreciation of his lifelong advocacy of Communism, Maoist China once celebrated a national holiday in Du Bois's honor. In 1959, he was awarded the Lenin Peace Prize. Now in 1996, the darling of the Communist world has been canonized by the state of Massachusetts' flagship university.

William Edward Burghardt Du Bois embodied the principles of radical multiculturalism long before they became fashionable on American college and university campuses. In many ways, he was the original multiculturalist. The first to unite the core tenets of multiculturalism—a mélange of Marxism, anti-Americanism, and racial balkanization—Du Bois could not be a more fitting patron saint for modern institutions of higher learning. Students at the University of Massachusetts–Amherst now have the opportunity to live on segregated dormitory floors, join race-based fraternities, and retreat into the ethically homogenous worlds of the school's seven "cultural" centers. Touting the premier Marxist economics department in the country, as well as history professors who boast that their classes will be consistently anti-American, the University of Massachusetts has become a caricature of political correctness, where extreme multiculturalism has been institutionalized and Du Bois's vision for a "just" community is reality. Taxpayers and parents may rightfully decry the move by the University of Massachusetts to honor a Stalinist advocate of racial separatism who renounced his citizenship. Unfortunately, there could not be a more fitting symbol for what academia now represents.

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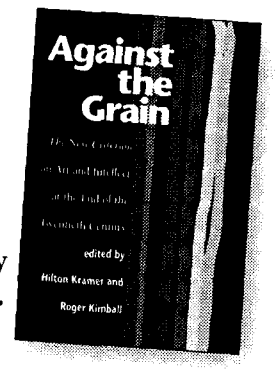

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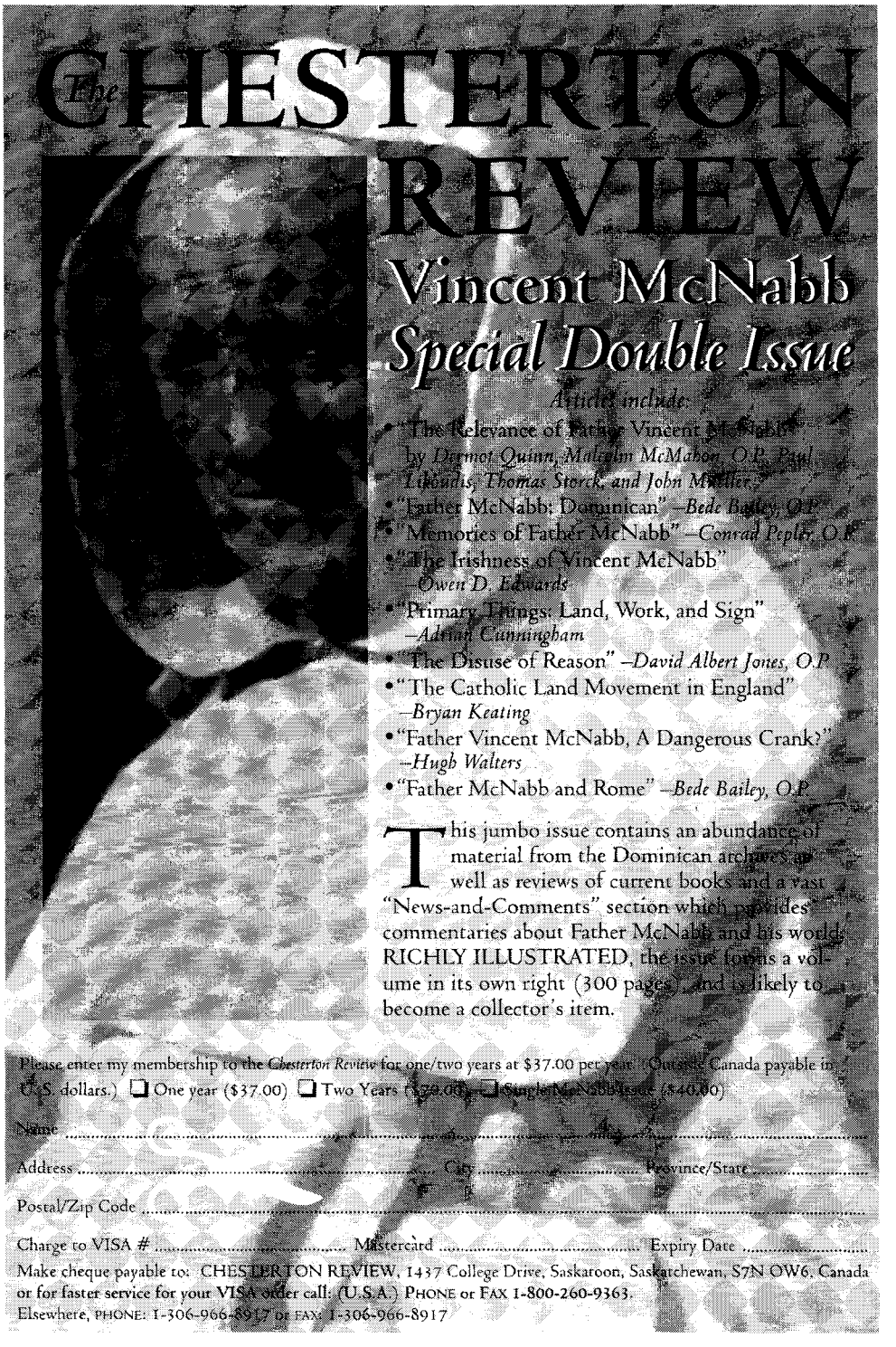

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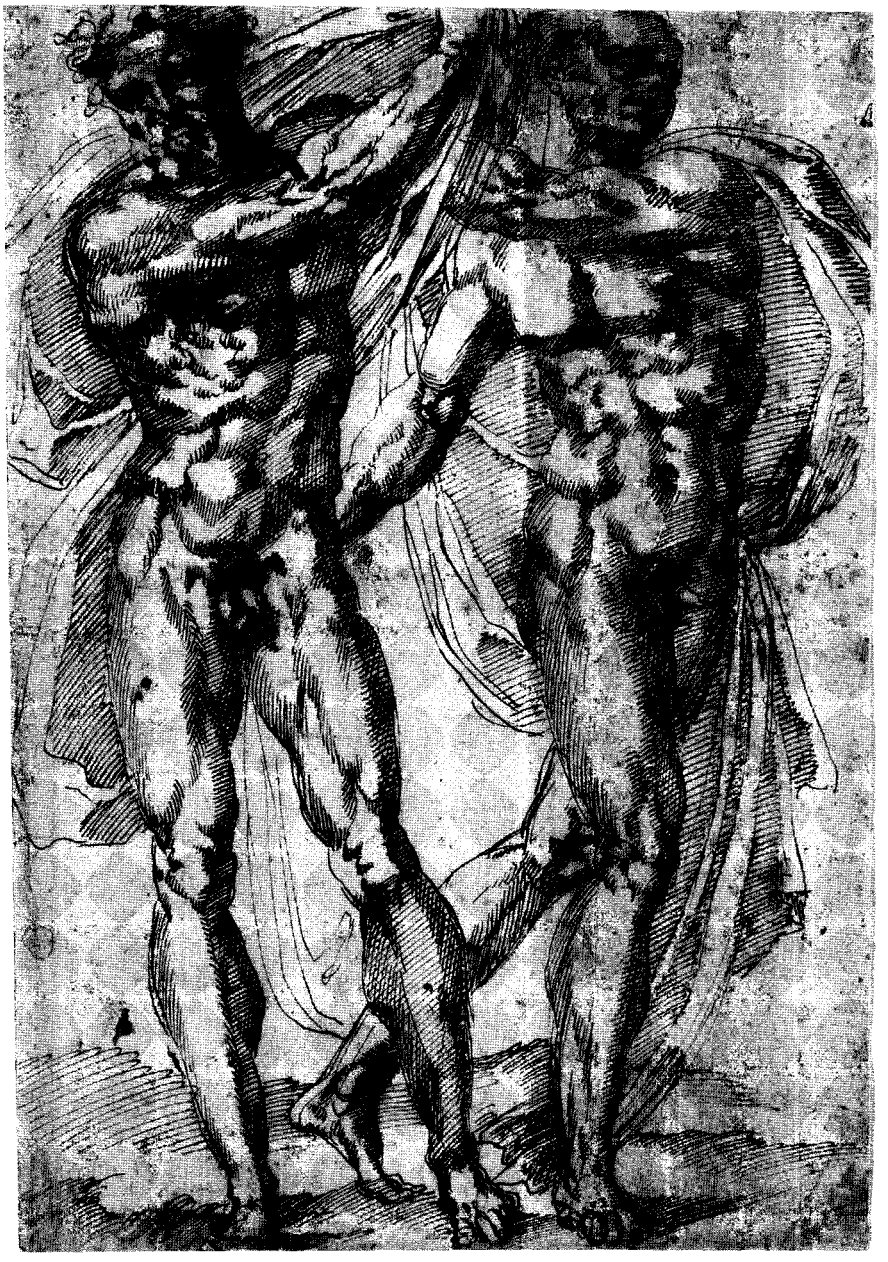

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